

ABSTRACT

ATTENDANCE TO DISCIPLESHIP: A STUDY OF THE ORCHARD 101 COURSE

by

Ben Cathey

The Project studied the Orchard 101 membership course at the Orchard Church in Loganville, Georgia. The research measured the self-reported degree of change of respondents in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship. The research was an evaluative study in the experimental mode utilizing a researcher-designed questionnaire administered just before the Orchard 101 course, immediately following the last session, and three months after the final session. A control group of Orchard attenders who did not take the Orchard 101 course was utilized for comparative analysis purposes.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Background

I do not remember the first person I helped become a member at Temple United Methodist Church (UMC), but I do remember the feelings that surrounded that first experience and subsequent experiences to follow. I wondered if the new member would really become an active part of that local body of Christ. For many people the commitment of membership in a local church is very casual and only required for good citizenship and respectability among friends. I wondered if my first member at Temple UMC really understood and embraced the idea that she was committing her life to advancing God's kingdom.

As a young Methodist pastor, I had been taught that membership in a local church was only a beginning point in the journey. If church attenders would just stand in front of the congregation and verbally agree to support the church with prayers, presence, gifts, and service, then they were in and could be taken from that point forward to fully functioning membership and committed discipleship. The spoken and unspoken pressure placed on my peers and leaders was simple: "A successful church is a church with a growing membership roll." The prevailing ambition among clergy was just to grow the membership roll, so they would be considered good pastors among colleagues and their future careers would be bright. During these formative ministry years, I received very little guidance, spoken or unspoken, about efforts to ensure that new members were making a solid commitment that would benefit personal spiritual growth and the advance of God's kingdom. The notion that a new member is interested, equipped, and ready to

grow spiritually and work to advance God's kingdom appeared to be assumed or ignored by church leaders and colleagues. Support and accountability related to carrying out any explicit requirements, directives, or expectations regarding the vows of church membership was minimalistic in a nearly unanimous majority of the United Methodist churches with which I came into contact.

From June 1997 to June 2000, I served as the senior associate pastor at Mountain Park UMC in the eastern suburbs of Atlanta. I was the staff person in charge of "getting new members to sign on the dotted line." In my more righteous moments, I called this job "evangelism." In my more weary moments, I called this job "keeping the district superintendent happy." From 1997 to 2000, I helped more than four hundred people join Mountain Park UMC as new members. I was conscious of the need to help new members become active disciples, so I talked with each of them about the commitment they were making. This face-to-face time was usually made available during a home visit, a lunch appointment, or a fifteen-minute meeting before or after Sunday worship. At Mountain Park UMC, the only requirement for membership was the agreement to support the church with prayers, presence, gifts, and service and a general acknowledgement of profession of faith in Christ or a record of previous baptism. Sadly, I watched many new members slip away from church life within just a few months of joining. Others maintained semi-regular attendance but never became involved with the missionary, kingdom-advancing, and disciple-making side of membership. My best guess is that only about 10 to 15 percent of those four hundred members were highly involved at Mountain Park UMC as fully functioning members and highly committed disciples at the point of my departure in June 2000.

These formative ministry experiences awakened a passion within me to overcome this phenomenon that I had seen repeat itself during my first five years of full-time pastoral leadership. I began to ask questions about the membership requirements and processes in local United Methodist churches. I asked myself what was missing. I sought out churches that really were producing large numbers of fully functioning members and committed disciples instead of just large numbers. I dreamed of a ministry environment where members joined a local church fully expecting to be completely involved and passionate about the life of the church, about personal spiritual growth, and about the plight of those outside the church.

Understanding the Problem

The problem, simply stated in its broadest context, is the modern-era United Methodist tradition of expecting very little from members and the coincidental decline in national church membership rolls. Currently, the member-to-Sunday worship attendance ratio in the United Methodist Church is only 41 percent (Babbitt 660-87). Obviously, members are not held accountable for attending worship regularly in most United Methodist churches.

The “high expectation” membership process (and the subsequent outcome) at the Orchard stands outside the mainstream of thinking in the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. Upon the questioning of several colleagues, I do not know of any United Methodist church in the North Georgia Conference that has a membership process as extensive as the process at the Orchard. In fact, through personal experience, I have found that common wisdom among pastors in this area is to help people become

members as quickly and easily as possible so that they can then help the member become committed to Christ and the local church.

I have also perceived that the membership commitment at the average United Methodist church is clearly worded but vaguely interpreted. Members are asked to support the church with their prayers, presence, gifts, and service, but little explanation or expectation concerning the practical implications of that commitment is provided. Many authors discuss the meaning of membership in a United Methodist church, but their writing is presented most accurately as study material for the “already committed” instead of catechetical material for the “not-yet decided” (Ammons 1-28; Bales 8-96; Custer 61-70; Elford 6-134; Frank 180-84; Kerr 30-32; Koehler 7-30; Thurston 2-34; Tuell 48-55). Although new members who have not previously received the sacrament of baptism are required to do so upon joining, they are not asked to live the Christian faith in such a way that their behavior is measurable and open to accountability.

These long-standing traditions with the United Methodist Church and other Protestant denominations coupled with the push for clergy to be successful through large membership rolls have, in fact, created an environment where numbers are declining and commitment is low. If measured by membership and Sunday worship attendance figures, the zeal and purpose of the UMC has been in decline for over thirty-five years.

In 2001, the United Methodist Church reported a membership of 8,334,204 people, but the average Sunday worship attendance was only 3,487,629 people. A maximum of only 41 percent of the members of the average United Methodist (UM) church actually attended on any given Sunday in 2001 (Babbitt 144). This number does not account for nonmembers in worship, so the ratio of attendance to members is actually

lower. I briefly studied my local environment for the year 2001, as well. I researched membership and attendance figures of three districts within the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, including the district where the Orchard resides, Athens-Elberton. The LaGrange district had a Sunday worship attendance to membership ratio of 37 percent. The Atlanta-Roswell district had a Sunday worship attendance to membership ratio of 43 percent. The Athens-Elberton district had a Sunday worship attendance to membership ratio of 32 percent (660-87). Shedding light on the severity of the problem, I have not perceived any level of urgency regarding low member commitment in the United Methodist Church. It is simply accepted as a normal part of church life in my ministry context.

This history of low member commitment has occurred alongside an environment of decades-old church decline. The United Methodist Church has dropped from a zenith of 11,054,634 members in 1964 to just 8,334,204 by 2001 (Babbitt 30; Wilke 16). Over a thirty-seven year period, the United Methodist Church has lost 2,720,430 from the membership rolls equaling 73,525 new nonmembers every year. Richard B. Wilke reports that in 1984 the average United Methodist church had 245 members (26). Using Wilke's numbers, one can ascertain that the UMC has closed almost a church a day from 1964 to 2001. During the decade of the 1990s, the news remained negative. Between 1990 and 2000, the United Methodist Church membership rolls decreased by 740,403 people, equaling almost 7 percent of its members ([American Religion Data Archive](#)). The mission of the UMC is to "make disciples," but statistical evidence highlights the fact that it cannot maintain a stable and growing membership commitment toward this purpose in the midst of a growing American population. Describing the effectiveness of

the UMC to complete its mission as problematic is an understatement. The UMC must change or die.

William H. Willimon and Robert L. Wilson reported a similar problem with many different mainline denominations that traditionally have low expectations for their members. They studied church decline between 1968 and 1983 and found that the Episcopal Church had a membership decline of 17 percent. The United Church of Christ declined 16 percent. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) dropped by 29 percent. Finally, the Presbyterian Church (USA) dropped by 25 percent (12). The decline that Willimon and Wilson cited during a fifteen-year period spanning the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s continued into the decade of the 1990s. Between 1990 and 2000, the four churches mentioned above lost 856,813 members and closed 1,039 churches equaling an average decline rate of over 8 percent ([American Religion Data Archive](#)).

Reasons for the decline of so many churches and for the lack of attendance commitment from members in United Methodist churches certainly goes deeper than the membership process. Nevertheless, the membership process strikes at the heart of the matter because the membership roll has been the aspect of church life that has been most noticeably declining. This declining membership roll points to the idea that members of the UMC are not following through with the commitment to attend worship or invite others to do the same.

The membership process in any congregation is one of the most important ministry structures. It serves as the foundational event for future ministry involvement because it communicates expectations and calls for decision. I am convinced that a healthy membership process is directly connected to healthy participation afterwards. A

healthy membership process solves a myriad of future problems by working to ensure that new members are operating with similar perspectives about the mission and ministry of the church. The membership process can communicate a sense of expectation that calls members to be healthy and active or it can communicate a sense of haphazardness that does not call members to anything except membership. The latter of these two choices can be numbing and paralyzing for any church. A healthy membership process plants the seeds for a vibrant membership experience that includes high levels of commitment to the local church and authentic discipleship in everyday life. These observations are reported from experience, but curiously, discussion about the importance of the membership process in modern church growth literature has been limited. I researched many well-known church growth authors to find clues as to how the membership process affected church growth and discipleship, and I found no mention of the membership class as a tool for assimilation (Chaney and Lewis 172-75; Hunter, Leading 51-54; To Spread the Power 194-95; Jenson and Stevens 126-45; Schaller 56; Shawchuck and Rath 55-66; Towns, Vaughn, and Seifert 203-06; Wagner 205-09).

The one source I have found that points to the correlation between a healthy membership process and healthy involvement afterward is a recent study by Thom S. Rainer. In this study, Rainer reports that growing and healthy churches in America today appear to have systems in place far removed from membership processes that require little or no actual commitment from new members. Rainer studied 287 churches in thirty-three different states with populations of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. His findings indicate that the churches best at retaining members and involving members were “high expectation” churches. He defines “high expectation” churches as those

churches that had specific requirements prior to membership and specific expectations for involvement following membership (High Expectations 14). This study suggests that a healthy membership process is a key factor for changing the current low expectation environment to one that creates healthy disciples who are highly committed to the local church.

In a church culture where only about one-third to four-tenths of the members attend church on any given Sunday, one could easily conclude that the church is failing to lead its members to accomplish its stated mission-“making disciples of Jesus Christ.” A vibrant and healthy membership process should be a key factor in helping churches reverse this trend. Instead of a one-third attendance to member ratio, churches that begin to take membership more seriously grow towards developing an attendance to member ratio that exceeds 100 percent of its members (Rainer, High Expectations 175-77; Slaughter and Miller 16, 68-75; Warren, Purpose Driven Church 98). The statistical and demographic findings reported above lead one to wonder if an important part of achieving greater church membership health in the United Methodist denomination will be the development of a process that helps new members understand and fulfill the explicit membership requirements and live as highly committed disciples of Jesus.

Theological and Biblical Foundations

The primary theological and biblical foundation for this study is found in Jesus’ command to his first disciples to go and make new disciples. Supporting this foundation is the subsequent response of early followers who began new communities of faith in ever broadening circles, and the past and present call upon followers of Jesus to bring new people into a kingdom relationship and instruct them in the way of following Jesus

through the ministry of local churches. The circular, repetitive, and broadening nature of disciple making is the primary biblical reason to study the membership process in a local church. Members should be disciples, and a disciple is required to make a new disciple.

If God's kingdom is to reign on earth, then the mandate is clear. God's children must act upon the precepts of faith to *go and make* new followers, help them to *maturity*, then *send* them back into the world to repeat the process (Matt. 28:18-20). An essential part of this process for making, teaching, and sending disciples is the membership process in the local church (Rainer, High Expectations 1-177; Slaughter and Miller 16, 68-75). One reason that churches do not reproduce themselves today is because members are not asked to take on important roles in nurturing the kingdom of God. They are not asked to "go and make." A lack of missionary zeal inhibits growth in spiritual maturity and does not give members confidence to reproduce themselves. The membership process all too easily becomes a by-product of the need to belong instead of a call to active involvement and committed discipleship.

Going and Making New Followers

Whether called faith sharing, evangelism, witnessing, or telling the good news, the Bible clearly calls followers of Jesus to make new followers of Jesus. George Barna writes, "The end goal of disciples is both personal and corporate. The personal goal is to live a life worthy of the name Christian. The corporate goal is to introduce other people to Jesus" (23). In Matthew 28 Jesus' final words to his disciples before departing earth introduced the corporate goal for all disciples who would follow:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (vv.18-20, NIV)

The primary verb in this passage is *matheteuo*, which is translated “make disciples” or “make committed followers.” It is also an imperative verb that is supported by three participles: *poreuo* (“going”); *baptiszo* (“baptizing”) and *didasko* (“teaching”). These three participles answer the question of how to make disciples. The implications of the answer to this question are far reaching and point to the need for a functional membership process that helps people fully engage the Christian faith through active involvement in the local church and highly committed discipleship in their daily lives.

Poreuo (“going”) is an aorist circumstantial participle that does not necessarily mean to go to another place. It is more closely related to the phrase “as you are going.” Jesus is calling his followers to make new followers wherever they go and in whatever circumstances they find themselves living. The call is upon every follower in every situation, not just upon a few who are specially called to move from one cultural environment to another (Barna 23; Heiberg 51-52; Hull, Disciple Making Pastor 50-52).

Helping Them to Maturity

Baptiszo (“baptizing”) is a present participle and is an essential step in making new disciples. Baptism is the initiation rite into the family of God and the church. It is the sign and seal of the new covenant made with believers by Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is an outward symbol of an inward grace; therefore, it is essential for committed discipleship. As discovered in Chapter 2, baptism is also rightly understood in today’s United Methodist church as necessary for membership. The membership processes in local churches should adequately address the sacramental reality of baptism apart from it being a perfunctory rite required for belonging. At its best, the teaching that surrounds

membership and baptism serves as a catalyst for the new believer to grow in faith (Barna 23; Heiberg 51-52; Hull, Disciple Making Pastor 50-52).

Didasko (“teaching”) is also a present participle so it must begin immediately in the life of the new believer; however, it is also an ongoing process throughout the life of the disciple. Although we are to obey all of God’s commands, part of “*didasko*” is consequently teaching about obeying the command to make new disciples. Jesus did not call his disciples to make converts who remained the same upon conversion. Jesus did not call his disciples to make people who plateau spiritually and require constant oversight and shepherding until death. He called them to make disciples who would grow in faith through obedience and, in turn, make and shepherd new disciples (Barna 23; Heiberg 51-52; Hull, Disciple Making Pastor 50-52).

Sending Them Back into the World

The nature of this process is circular and never ending. A committed disciple is one who not only adheres to the faith but who intentionally invites others to participate in that faith and trains them to grow in maturity so they can then reproduce themselves by inviting others to do the same. The disciple is called to make new disciples, but when the new disciple is made, the fact remains the same: the disciple is called to make new disciples.

The problem of this study is supported by this clear biblical mandate for all followers of Jesus and Christian churches to make more and better followers of Jesus through their ministry efforts. If people are to gather as the church, then the process of membership into that local church becomes a necessity. In Chapter 2 this foundation for

inquiry is expanded to address specifically those biblical passages that speak to fully functioning membership in a local church and the characteristics for healthy discipleship.

The Context of the Study

The context for the study is the membership process at the Orchard Church where I am currently beginning my fifth year as pastor. Our mission is to “grow new and stronger followers of Jesus.” We are located about thirty-five miles northeast of the city of Atlanta in Loganville, Georgia. The membership process at the Orchard takes place in a six-week membership course called “Orchard 101–Getting Started at the Orchard.” Attendance at Orchard 101 is required for membership. An outline of the course is listed in Appendix B and full digital copies are available from Ben Cathey at ben@theorchardchurch.org. The course seeks to ensure that people join the Orchard with a clear commitment to Christ and a strong commitment to the Orchard’s mission and vision. It ends with a celebration dinner where new members are able to sign the membership covenant (Appendix C) and receive the sacrament of baptism or reaffirm their baptismal vows.

At 10:00 a.m. on 3 March 2002, seventeen brave core team members launched the first public worship service of the Orchard Church with 135 people present, about forty of whom were well-wishers from outside the Loganville community. As of October 2005, God has blessed us with 169 members and a thriving weekly attendance of 240 people or more. These 169 members have all completed a six-week course called Orchard 101. These new members have responded with extraordinary passion and commitment. They are involved and passionate, and they understand their ministry context. As of the fall of 2005, 88 percent of them were involved with ministry efforts beyond worship, 68 percent

were involved with a small group, and 79 percent of them served regularly on one of the many different serve teams. A large percentage of Orchard members are fully functioning members and committed disciples.

The attendance to member ratio at the Orchard consistently exceeds 130 percent and has exceeded 200 percent on occasion. We have reached this attendance to member ratio with little fanfare outside of the Orchard itself. Our attendance to member ratio has not been celebrated or recognized within the official structures of the North Georgia United Methodist Church. However, to be fair, the high percentage of new members who have come to the Orchard by profession of faith has been celebrated. Denominationally, we minister in a context where membership is seen as a bridge to belonging but not necessarily to active involvement or discipleship. The hope for active involvement and discipleship is certainly present in the United Methodist Church, but it is not explicitly stated, and members are not held accountable to it. The Orchard stands outside this denominational culture.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the research project was to study the Orchard 101 membership course at the Orchard United Methodist Church to determine if participants report change in the degree to which they are fully functioning members and highly committed disciples as compared to those who did not participate in Orchard 101.

Research Questions

1. What degree of change is reported in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in those Orchard Church attenders who have completed the Orchard 101 membership course?
2. What degree of change is reported in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in those Orchard Church attenders who have not completed the Orchard 101 membership course?
3. What are the differences in the degree of change in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship between the group who completed Orchard 101 and the group who did not complete Orchard 101?
4. What demographic differences in the two audiences might also account for any observed differences in their self-reported answers?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions attempt to clarify the focus of the project.

Orchard 101 Membership Course

Orchard 101 is a six-week course required for membership at the Orchard Church. A full copy without homework is available in Appendix B. The topics covered are

- Week One—Beginning the Journey of Following Jesus,
- Week Two—Small Groups and Methodism,
- Week Three—Spiritual Gifts,
- Week Four—Evangelism and Tithing,
- Week Five—Mission, Core Ministry Values, and Ministry Design,
- Week Six—Membership Expectations.

Orchard Church Attender

An attender attends Sunday worship at the Orchard at least occasionally, and has been involved with one or more Orchard activities other than Sunday worship. Only those attenders age 13 and above qualified for this study.

Fully Functioning Member

A fully functioning member is a member of the church who is actively seeking to fulfill all of the explicit membership purposes at the Orchard. These are Reaching Up, Branching Out, Bearing Fruit, Standing Firm, and Growing Deep. They are defined by eight factors: worship, fellowship, service, evangelism, prayer, stewardship, care, and spiritual growth. The study factors regarding fully functioning membership are different from the disciple factors because the member factors relate specifically to certain actions within The Orchard while disciple factors relate to whole life actions and attitudes. These factors are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Highly Committed Disciple

Highly committed disciples are people who understand their relationship with Jesus to be the center priority in life. They filter daily decisions through this relationship and are committed to future growth. Nine specific characteristics for a highly committed disciple are discussed in Chapter 2. These characteristics are as follows:

- Being assured of salvation,
- Placing discipleship as the number one priority in life,
- Obeying God's laws and commands,
- Representing God in the world,
- Serving and caring for others,

- Being trained by God's Word,
- Maintaining intimacy with God,
- Making new disciples, and
- Stewarding God's resources.

High Expectation Church

The high expectation church places a high level of expectation upon its members and has specific requirements necessary for becoming a member and maintaining membership.

The Project

Orchard 101 is a researcher-designed, six-week membership course I taught to those seeking membership in the Orchard United Methodist Church. The course is designed to mirror a small group environment where interaction, discussion, and mutual sharing are key elements for teaching. The course uses games, videos, discussion questions, homework, and fill in the blank notes to help participants learn. The overall goal of the course is to help new members at the Orchard become highly active participants in Orchard ministries and highly committed disciples in every area of living. Every Orchard member is required to take the course, so makeup sessions were provided for those participants who missed two or less weeks. Typically, makeup sessions lasted about forty-five minutes and were more content oriented as opposed to discussion oriented because the makeup groups ranged in size from one to five people.

The intervention (Orchard 101) was administered to forty-one people ranging in ages from 13 to 60. The intervention included three different course periods. The first two courses began in September 2004 with a Sunday evening session that included twenty

participants and a Wednesday evening session that included twelve participants. The third course began in September 2005 on Sunday evenings and included nine participants.

Every participant received a personal three-ring binder with all Orchard 101 course materials in it at the beginning of the course. At the first session, expectations for the course were discussed (see Appendix D). Childcare was provided on-site for parents. An outline of the Orchard 101 course is available as Appendix B. A brief discussion of each session follows.

Week One—Beginning the Journey of Following Jesus

The goal for week one is to help new members in the Orchard gain one hundred percent confidence that they are followers of Jesus and to help nonbelievers make a decision to begin following Jesus before joining. Profession of Faith in Jesus is required for membership. The first session includes a discussion about what following Jesus is and what following Jesus is not. Briefly, following Jesus is a relationship based upon devotion and trust. It is an initial decision and an ongoing process that results in a fundamental lifestyle change producing inward transformation and outward fruit. The week-one session also includes an explanation about how to become a follower using a model called Admit, Acknowledge, Ask, and Accept. A model prayer to help people begin following Jesus is provided. The session concludes with a discussion of tips for following Jesus. The homework includes a brief Bible study of sayings of Jesus, a reading of chapter two from Josh McDowell's book, More Than A Carpenter, and several questions that help the participant reflect upon their own relationship with Jesus.

Week Two—Small Groups and Methodism

The week-two session has two primary goals. The first goal is to help participants learn about the unique small group system in the Orchard. The second goal is to discuss baptism and communion from a United Methodist perspective and to place the Orchard Church within the context of the larger United Methodist Church.

The small groups part of week two seeks to inform participants about the importance of small groups and the biblical models that support a modern small-group system within the local church. The biblical models used to describe small group life in the Orchard come from Moses' need to delegate in Exodus 18, Jesus' interaction with the disciples, and the gathering of believers in the book of Acts. Participants are also informed about the unique serve, reach, grow, love approach to small groups in the Orchard. Serve, reach, grow, and love are words that both describe the kinds of small groups in The Orchard as well as the essential four functions of every group.

The United Methodist part of week two focused on helping participants understand the context of the Orchard within the larger UM system. For most participants, the second session of Orchard 101 marks the first time they will learn about conferences, general conference, annual conferences, bishops, district superintendents, the Book of Discipline, and the appointment system. A Methodist understanding of the sacraments is also discussed. Most people are surprised to find out that Methodists believe in tri-modal baptism and they are usually challenged by the theology supporting infant baptism. The second session also includes a discussion about what does not happen at infant baptism. Every Orchard 101 course has concluded with at least two adult baptisms so the discussion is usually fruitful. Homework is not included for week two.

Week Three—Spiritual Gifts

The goal of the week-three session is to help participants identify their unique design for ministry. The session is basically a summary of the Network Course offered by the Willow Creek Church. (Bugbee, Cousins, and Hybels) The session opens with a discussion about the need for gifts to be identified and used within the local church. A nine-minute video from the Network curriculum featuring Bill Hybels adds a satirical touch and helps people identify with churches that practice arm-twisting, manipulation through guilt, and frequent volunteer burnouts in contrast to churches who help people identify and use their God-given gifts for ministry. The three areas of gifts that are discussed are Passion, Spiritual Gifts, and Personal Style. Homework includes three assessments called the Passion Assessment Tool, the Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool, and the Personal Style Assessment Tool. All three assessments are adapted from other sources including the Network resource.

Week Four—Evangelism and Tithing

The title of the week-four session is actually called “Two Big Scary Words.” Most people come to the session unaware of the ensuing discussion about evangelism and tithing. The evangelism session hinges around a dream for evangelism in the Orchard and four distinctives that describe Orchard evangelistic practices. The dream for evangelism in the Orchard is as follows:

“The dream for the Orchard is that we will be a church that talks to them instead of about them. We will get to know them. It is not their responsibility to find us, but our responsibility to find them. We will refuse to be a closed community. We will diligently work to live in this world as a light for all people, being present with and enjoying friends who do not yet know Jesus.”

The four distinctives for evangelist involvement within the Orchard are high love, low pressure, high expectation, and hard work. The four disincentives were adapted from Steve Sjogren's book, Conspiracy of Kindness.

The tithing part of week five explores the biblical underpinnings for generous giving and tithing. Participants are challenged to begin offering a percentage of their income right away, and to grow to the full tithe within three years. For the homework assignment, participants are asked to seriously consider tithing by discussing it with a friend or spouse during the week. Homework for week four also includes an invitation to participate in a servant evangelism project. Attendance at the servant evangelism project is not required to complete the course.

Week Five—Mission, Core Ministry Values, and Ministry Design

Week five describes the mission of the Orchard in detail. The mission is “Growing New and Stronger Followers of Jesus.” Two models for understanding how people move from new to stronger followers of Jesus are presented. The first is the front porch, den, kitchen progression that has been successfully used by the North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The second is the Five Cs model (community, crowd, congregation, committed, and core) that has been successfully used by the Saddleback Church in Orange County, California. The unique ministry environments and core values of the Orchard Church are also discussed. Homework includes a reading of a six-page document called “Orchard Crew-Who Are They?” that seeks to describe the target audience for the ministry of The Orchard Church. Reflection questions are included in the homework.

Week Six—Member Expectations

The goal of the week-six session is to explain the expectations for membership in the Orchard clearly. The core value of meaningful membership is discussed in depth. Membership in the Orchard is a commitment to participate with others to accomplish its mission through the worship +2 involvement strategy. The membership commitment for the Orchard includes signing a membership covenant (see Appendix C) and a commitment to participate in a ministry involvement strategy called worship +2. All members are asked to attend worship regularly, participate in one ministry that helps them grow deep, and one ministry that helps them reach out. Lastly, accountability measures for membership are discussed. Briefly, worship +1 is required to maintain membership in the Orchard. If no record of participation in ministry beyond weekly attendance at worship exists, then the member is placed on an inactive member list. The list is not made public and is not part of denominational record keeping. After one year on the inactive membership list the member is removed from the membership roles of the Orchard Church. Session six does not include homework.

Methodology

The study evaluated self-reported behavioral changes in new members at the Orchard Church who completed the six-week Orchard 101 membership course. The study also evaluated self-reported behavioral changes in a separate group of regular attenders who did not take the Orchard 101 membership course. The second group served as a control group that did not receive the intervention of the study, which is the Orchard 101 membership course. This study was an evaluation of individual participant's self-reported change stemming from three different testing periods. The first testing period was just

before the Orchard 101 course began. The second period was immediately after the Orchard 101 course ended. The third and final period was three months after the conclusion of the Orchard 101 course. Change scores for those receiving the course instruction were compared to the change scores for those not receiving the course instruction.

Instrumentation

The degree of change in participants was measured using a researcher-designed, Likert-scale questionnaire that assessed eight factors relating to fully functioning membership and nine factors relating to highly committed discipleship (see Appendix A). The individual factors are discussed in Chapter 3. The study was conducted using a researcher-designed, Likert-scale questionnaire administered in a longitudinal pre-post manner (see Appendix A). The questionnaire explored self-perceptions relating to the degree of change in highly committed discipleship and fully functioning membership at the Orchard Church. The goal of the study was to gain responses from at least twenty-five participants who took Orchard 101 and twenty-five participants who did not take Orchard 101. The rationale behind the design is discussed in Chapter 3.

Subjects

The population of this study was attenders at the Orchard Church in Loganville, Georgia. Subjects who took Orchard 101 self-selected to do so upon advertisement in the worship bulletin (see Appendix D), Sunday worship announcements, and invitation by letter (see Appendix E). Subjects who became members of the control group also self-selected to do so from among Orchard attenders. Those subjects in the group that did not take Orchard 101 were invited to participate in the study via letter and personal invitation

see (Appendix F). Current and former members at the Orchard were not included in the study. People who chose not to become members of the Orchard after taking Orchard 101 in the past were also not eligible for the study. All participants in the study were 13 years of age or older. This age limit is dictated by the membership requirements at the Orchard that ask all members 13 years and older to be fully engaged with the explicit membership requirements.

Data Collection

The questionnaire is made up of demographic information along with fifty-one questions relating to the two outcomes and seventeen factors of the study. The questions were answered anonymously. I administered the questionnaire at the beginning of the first session of the Orchard 101 course and then again at the last session of Orchard 101. All other data collection took place via mail or immediately following Sunday worship. Measures were taken to assure that the respondents did not report change for the purpose of pleasing their pastor. The questionnaire was given anonymously and the nature of the study was never revealed to the control group or the intervention group.

Variables

The independent variable for this project was the six-week Orchard 101 membership course. The course instructor and the content of the course remained the same for the length of the study (see Appendix B).

The dependent variables in this study were the reported degrees of change as evaluated from those receiving Orchard 101 and those not receiving Orchard 101 in terms of the characteristics of a fully functioning member and a highly committed disciple.

The design of the study does not consider intervening and control variables because the impact of the Orchard 101 course was studied in two subsequent periods of time at the same church with the same instructor and course material. Organismic variables were used to ask questions for further study but were not used in the analysis of data.

Generalizability

The study focused only upon subjects at the Orchard Church in Loganville, Georgia. The findings may have direct implications for the Orchard Church and the success of its mission: “growing new and stronger followers of Jesus.”

In terms of generalizability, this study may specifically apply only to the Orchard Church; however, the use of a control group in the study should legitimize broader applications of the study. The motivation for the study emerged from a personal desire to see the membership commitment in the local church become a meaningful instrument for moving people toward highly committed discipleship and fully functioning membership. The context of concern is my experience serving as an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. Churches in my denomination normally have a worship attendance of only one-third to four-tenths their membership size (Babbitt 56). Almost all churches, United Methodist and others, have in place some kind of process for becoming a member. This study may prove helpful to all churches that are seeking to help new members become fully functioning participants and highly committed disciples. The findings of the study should lend support to any church considering a more rigorous process of membership or a more intentional evaluation of how the process of membership helps to

make committed disciples. The study should have implications within the denominational context and beyond.

Lastly, if the study shows that a “high expectation” membership process is beneficial toward fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship then it might also address more specific issues regarding membership and discipleship.

Delimitations

This study did not attempt to evaluate organismic or intervening variables such as prior faith involvement, prior church involvement, prior involvement at the Orchard, individual learning styles, the gender of the subjects, or the age of the subjects. The inclusion of intervening and organismic variables did not benefit this study because of the overbearing complexity they would bring to it. They would have distracted the study from a clear focus upon the common overall impact of the Orchard 101 process. Nevertheless, the focus of research question 4 allows for some conjecture about organismic variables that may prove to be beneficial for further study and evaluation. Any discussion of intervening variables is based solely on assumptions that may be explored to a further degree in future research efforts.

The primary focus of the study was the reported degrees of change as evaluated from those receiving Orchard 101 and those not receiving Orchard 101, in terms of the characteristics of a fully functioning member and a highly committed disciple. This study did not attempt to statistically assess which specific topics in the Orchard 101 course were most influential in achieving change. However, plausible assumptions can be made as a participant observer.

A Look Ahead

In Chapter 2, selected literature and research pertinent to this study are reviewed. Ancient and contemporary developments of the membership process are discussed. Specific attention is given to the early Church and subsequent developments, the Wesleyan movement, early Methodism, the current understanding of membership in the United Methodist Church, and existing “high expectation” church trends. The theological and biblical underpinnings regarding highly committed discipleship and fully functioning membership are also discussed in Chapter 2. In this section I explore the biblical images of membership in a local church and examine the biblical-theological characteristics for highly committed discipleship.

In Chapter 3, a detailed explanation regarding the design of the study, including instrumentation, data collection, and specific factors that define membership and discipleship, are presented. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the project. Chapter 5 interprets major findings of the study and discusses practical applications that flow from the research.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENTS IN THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Understanding the biblical-theological and historical contexts of discipleship and membership in the local Christian church is important when evaluating the membership process as it relates to fully functioning members and highly committed disciples. This literature review is limited to two broad frameworks of discovery. The first framework focuses upon the biblical and theological contexts for the study. The second framework focuses upon the process of membership in particular.

Framework One—Biblical and Theological Contexts

This framework can be described as the desired outcome for membership in a local church. This section focuses upon the biblical-theological perspectives regarding highly committed discipleship and fully functioning membership. In this section I explore church membership from the perspective of the kingdom of God and examine the biblical-theological characteristics for committed discipleship.

Church Membership

A member of a United Methodist church is defined in the following terms from the United Methodist Book of Discipline 2000:

When persons unite with a local United Methodist church, they profess their faith in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus his only Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Thus, they make known their desire to live daily lives as disciples of Jesus Christ (Olsen 121)

The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms simply defines a member as “one who is a formal and official part of a church or ecclesiastical body” (McKim 171).

By definition, membership in the church is defined by the nature of the Christian church; however, as I discuss later, the church (*ekklesia*) and the biblical images of membership in that church are best understood in the context of the reign of God's kingdom (*basileia*).

The church. Biblical words do not have fixed technical meanings. They were, instead, ordinary words used to describe or represent particular concepts and ideas; therefore, one word can be replaced with another and still describe the same concept adequately. Although theology cannot be built on the basis of words alone, words do provide a functional lens into the broader concepts and ideas that they seek to describe (Giles 4-5).

The word *ekklesia* (church or congregation) is derived from *ek* meaning “out of” and *klesis* meaning “to call.” *Ekklesia* was used in a Greek secular sense to describe a body of citizens who gathered to discuss the affairs of the state (Bruce 83-84). Early believers did not meet in public buildings designated for the purposes of worship for at least the first 120 years of the Christian era (Richards 167). Church did not refer to a building or an established organization but to a group of people who were called out of their different places in humanity to gather around a common purpose (Van Gelder 101-05).

Therefore, the early Christian Church was a group of gathered people who had a cause and purpose centered upon Jesus. A group of people with any particular civic purpose in New Testament times may have been adequately called a church, but the Christian Church must have Jesus at the center of its purposes for existence, mission, and common experiences. A church of Christ, properly understood, is an extension of Christ's

incarnational ministry on earth. A local church is called to be the manifestation of Christ in its community (Chaney and Lewis 21-23).

The kingdom. The *ekklesia* is best understood in the context of the *basileia* (God's kingdom). In its most general and basic sense, a kingdom refers to the realm where a ruler acts to carry out his will. In God's economy, this realm is a diverse place (Richards 378).

Many in modern times only think of kingdom as a place, but the meaning of kingdom in New Testament literature is much more rich and diverse. It did not always refer to a place. Sometimes it referred to an activity, and sometimes a certain condition. When the Greek or Aramaic (*malkuta*) words for kingdom are used in conjunction with God, the term also has rich and diverse meanings. The phrase "God's kingdom" sometimes refers to God's saving activity, sometimes to the resulting condition of salvation in the lives of people, and sometimes to a place one enters, inherits, obtains, or is excluded from at the end of time (Witherington 8). Because of the diverse nature of God's kingdom, Ben Witherington, III believes that the phrase "God's kingdom" might be best understood in modern English as the dominion or realm of God's reign (9). This realm exists wherever God is in control (Richards 378).

God's kingdom is described in two different ways in the Old Testament. As king of the created universe, God is shaping history's flow according to his will. This work is usually hidden, but at times, such as the Exodus, God breaks into time and space to achieve his will. Nevertheless, the Old Testament also looks forward to a time when God's Messiah will step into history to crush the enemies of Israel with raw power and

authority. This Messiah will be the Davidic successor established on the throne in Jerusalem. Through this Messiah God will bring peace to all peoples (Richards 378).

Jesus, however, came to usher in yet another expression of God's reign. This reign was introduced by John the Baptist when he preached, "Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2, NLT). John announced that the kingdom was coming, but Jesus declared its arrival. In a conversation with men who accused Jesus of performing miracles with the power of Satan he said, "But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has arrived among you" (Matt. 12:28). "There are other sayings of Jesus that also speak in a similar way of the presence of the reign of God in and through the ministry of Jesus (e.g., Matt. 11.5-6/Luke 7.22-3; Matt. 13.16-17/Luke 10.23-24; Matt. 11.12/Luke 16.16; Matt. 11.11/Luke 7.28)" (Giles 30).

The arrival of this kingdom Jesus proclaimed was an extension of the Old Testament understanding of God's reign. "In his proclamation of the Kingdom Jesus essentially continues the content of the prophetic hope offered to Israel in the Old Testament" (Saucy 217). This newly present kingdom also stands in contrast to the hope of the Old Testament. John preached about the kingdom in light of judgment, wrath, sin, and human readiness for it through repentance. Jesus, however, uniquely reveals God's kingdom as a realm of intimacy, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. "God is now 'Abba' and the *basileia* exists only in the context of God's fatherhood. The Kingdom is near (Mark 1:15) in the sense that the intimacy of 'Abba' is near" (217-18). Jesus declared the present reign of God through miracles and his resurrection, but equally important is the gathering of the people of God. Jesus not only proclaims the kingdom of God; he actually

opens it for people to enter. In Matthew 18:3 he says, “I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.” In Luke 16:16 he provides this important revelation when he says, “Until John the Baptist began to preach, the laws of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and eager multitudes are forcing their way in.” Those who chose to enter this kingdom form a new community where the rule of God is primary and life altering. Jesus proclamation of the kingdom is the offer of salvation in its fullest form; physical, spiritual, and emotional (Giles 30-31). Commenting about human decision and the kingdom, Mark Saucy writes the following:

Intimately associated with the Kingdom’s proclamation is the element of human decision. For the gospel writers, both the acts and the words of Jesus were intended to reveal the near approach of the eschatological Kingdom, but they were also intended to provoke a decision. Jesus did not come simply working wonders and teach with new authority; he came demanding a response from his hearers. (330)

Jesus’ words also reflect the reality of this aspect of the kingdom:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him! (John 14:6-7)

The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God’s reign centered in the life and work of Jesus.

Images of membership. When considering images of membership one must understand how the kingdom of God relates to membership in the local church? The church is not identical to God’s kingdom, but scholars agree that it is a servant and agent of God’s kingdom (Giles 21-60; Saucy 233-71; Van Gelder 54-87; Snyder, Community 45-98). Howard A. Snyder writes the following comments discussing a proper biblical perspective of the Church:

To speak of either the evangelistic or prophetic role of the Church without relating these to the Church's kingdom mission is to lose the biblical perspective and develop a truncated vision of the Church's calling. Biblically, neither evangelism nor social action can make full sense divorced from the fact of the Christian community as the visible, earthly expression of the Kingdom of God. (12-13)

A fully functioning member of the local church is, thus, an agent of God's present and coming kingdom. The biblical imagery that communicates about this membership is very beautiful and poetic. Each image speaks of a gathered community that has been called out of this world and to a special unity for the purpose of service in the realm of God's reign.

In his book, Paul S. Minear lists ninety-six different biblical images that describe the Church. The picture he presents is broad and meaningful. Aside from what he describes as thirty-two "minor" images of the Church, Minear categorizes the other sixty-four images into four "primary" images. These primary images are the people of God, the new creation, the fellowship of faith, and the body of Christ.

A key verse for the image of the people of God is 1 Peter 2:9, which says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (NRSV). Here the Church is pictured as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic expectations regarding the people of Israel. This new community finds its identity along faith lines instead of racial, political, institutional, or religious lines. The people of God are formed around a new identity that transcends all other identities. Namely they are set apart from all other allegiances as God's people, his children (Van Gelder 108-09). "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people...' They shall be called children of the living God" (Rom. 9:25-26).

Entering the realm of the kingdom as a member of a local church in light of the image of the people of God means joining the family of God. The image means becoming

brothers and sisters with other members of the family, and the image means experiencing the wonderful blessings of living in a household together.

Jesus taught the disciples that when he left, another helper would come. This helper, the Holy Spirit, was sent to indwell the community of faith with the fullness of God. When the church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the people of the church are seen as the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16), living stones that are being built into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5), members of the household of God (Eph. 2:9), and citizens with the saints (Eph. 2:9). These images show that the Church, by its very nature, is always in process and will exhibit characteristics of organizational and institutional life. Stones are still being laid into the temple. Members are still coming into the household. Citizens are still becoming part of the new nation. The process began at Pentecost and will continue until Christ's return. These images indicate that the Church will grow in stature, size, influence, and spiritual depth (Van Gelder 112-13).

Entering into the realm of God's reign as a member of a local church in light of the new creation image means submitting to the personal and communal work of the Holy Spirit as it leads the Church to seek and nurture the present and coming kingdom.

The image of the fellowship of faith is similar to "the people of God," but it is related more to the redeeming, cleansing, and unifying work of God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit than to the hope of Old Testament prophecy. Followers of Jesus experience a type of fellowship (*koinonia*) that only persons of faith can enjoy. This condition of being in fellowship is something God brings about. Reconciliation to God through his gift of Jesus ultimately leads to reconciliation with all other believers. This

special fellowship of the church demonstrates grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation to the world (Minear 136-45; Van Gelder 111-12).

Entering into the realm of God's reign as a member of a local church in light of this image means reconciling one's relationship with God and living with a deep sense of unity because of the common bond that reconciliation affords.

The image of the body of Christ is developed most fully by Paul in 1 Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, and Ephesians. Other authors of the New Testament also refer to this image. Gatherings of diverse bodies of people were common in Paul's day, but Paul attaches the body of Christ imagery to the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ giving it new meaning for the Church.

Paul relates the Church to the crucifixion of Christ when he writes, "The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). The unity of which Paul speaks is rooted in the sacrificial death of Jesus and the communal sacrifices of the members of the body. Members are called to live in sacrificial love to each other, which is the greatest gift of all (e.g., 1 Cor. 13).

Paul relates the Church to the resurrected Christ when he writes about the work of the Spirit through the headship of Jesus. "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). The Church is called to live interdependently under the headship of Christ. This interdependence and subsequent unity is a function of the different gifts the Spirit gives to members of the body.

The ascended Christ gives the clearest image of Jesus' headship of the body. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:22-23 that "God has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Paul's use of the body image and the headship of Christ in that body is closely related to the idea of God's reign. To be in Christ is to be within the realm of the reign of God (Van Gelder 110-11).

Entering into the realm of God's reign as a member of a local church in light of the body of Christ image means implementing the gifts of the Spirit in sacrificial love under the headship of Jesus.

Conclusions. The Orchard Church provides a good model for membership in light of these biblical and theological perspectives. Each member at the Orchard is asked to live out the lifestyle of following Jesus through worship, fellowship, service, evangelism, prayer, stewardship, care, and spiritual growth. These functions relate well with the demands of a membership seen in the context of the larger, universal Church and the "present" but "not-yet" reign of God's kingdom. Each function of membership calls the member both to receive God's reign in the present and nurture it for the future. Each function can also be aligned with one of the "primary" images of membership in the local church as listed above. The *people of God* image relates most closely to the functions of fellowship and care. The *new creation* image relates most closely to the member functions of evangelism and spiritual growth. The *fellowship of faith* image relates most closely to the member functions of worship and prayer. Finally, the *body of Christ* image relates most closely with the member functions of service and stewardship.

Summary. Briefly stated, a Christian church is a collection of highly committed disciples who seek to live out a faithful lifestyle that identifies with the present reign of God and nurtures the future reign of God. Recognizing that membership and discipleship are coequal terms in a church that is a “manifestation of Christ in its community” (Chaney and Lewis 65) and “an agent of the Kingdom of God” (Snyder, Community 233), the primary theological and biblical questions now center upon what the characteristics of committed disciples are.

Characteristics of Committed Disciples

At the very onset of Jesus’ public ministry, he called twelve men to follow him as he traveled throughout Judea bringing physical, spiritual, and emotional healing to the oppressed, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners, the possessed, and the poor, and preaching the good news to all who would gather to hear. Although Jesus had many followers including women, these twelve men came to be known as the disciples of Jesus.

The Greek word for disciple in the New Testament is *mathetos*. It means that one is a pupil of another or learns from another. In fact, the verb form, *manthano*, means to learn. This learning is accomplished either by practice or experience (Moulton 257). The earliest pictures of Jesus’ relationship with the disciples are certainly one of didactic teaching, but equally important, they are also ones of learning through the experience and practice of ministry. A disciple is someone who takes the knowledge of catechism and applies it to real-life situations. The disciples did not go to school so much as they went on a mission with Jesus and learned along the way. Every moment of instruction was given in the context of certain ministry experiences. Every experience meant following Jesus. Discipleship, then, can be defined as “becoming a complete and competent

follower of Jesus Christ” (Barna 17). This competency is gained from more than mere head knowledge; it is knowledge wrought in the context of real-life experience.

Through a review of pertinent literature and exposition of Scripture, I have identified nine characteristics of a highly committed disciple. This list is not exhaustive, but it should serve well as a foundational barometer for growth in following Jesus.

Being a disciple of Jesus in the New Testament means

- Being assured of salvation,
- Placing discipleship as the number one priority in life,
- Obeying God’s laws and commands,
- Representing God in the world,
- Serving and caring for others,
- Being trained by God’s Word,
- Maintaining intimacy with God,
- Making new disciples, and
- Stewarding God’s resources.

Being assured of salvation. Although discipleship is a journey toward greater growth and understanding, the journey has a beginning point. Bill Hull writes, “Technically, from the moment of spiritual birth, every Christian is a disciple” (Disciple Making Church 20). Jesus was prophesied to be the Messiah in many of the Old Testament prophetic writings and was revealed as such by angels during the time surrounding his birth (Luke 1-3). After being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus’ first call to his disciples was simply to follow him to “catch people” (Luke 5:10; Mark 1:17,

NIV). The meaning of following Jesus became clearer as the first disciples learned from Jesus and experienced his ministry firsthand.

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus revealed that "flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:6). Jesus told Nicodemus that he "must be born again" (v. 7), and he used the opportunity to teach the following:

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16)

Peter not only declared that Jesus was the Messiah in Matthew 16, but he also preached a message of salvation immediately following Pentecost. In that message Peter asked those present to respond to the good news of Jesus by stating the following: "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off; for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-9)

Discipleship begins with a sure experience of repentance that requires trust in Jesus. This experience is freely available to all who will receive it. A disciple of Jesus is marked and defined by this beginning act of trust that initiates the journey of following Jesus. As Barna writes, "Rejection of the cross is an insurmountable obstacle to being a committed follower of Jesus" (20). Baptism is the sacramental and/or ceremonial rite of those who become followers of Jesus, but it is not equal to the assurance of salvation.

Paul discusses the relationship between repentance and trust in Jesus:

For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. (Rom. 10:9, NLT)

Salvation is freely given by Jesus and freely received by those who believe and follow.

However, much more is expected of the disciple of Jesus than the initial decision to follow. Discipleship is a life-long journey that includes celebration, growth, education, new experiences, failures, risk, and reward. Through the many ups and downs of discipleship one gains assurance that stands apart from any technical confidence gained through certain proscribed and expected religious experiences. Assurance of salvation comes to those who know from memory that they have trusted Jesus and decided to follow him by believing and confessing, but assurance is ultimately gained by actually following Jesus and experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life.

John Wesley placed the topic of assurance of salvation in the context of the evidence that marks one as a follower of Jesus. For him, assurance of salvation was a theological alternative to the Calvinist doctrine of election (Langford 37). In his sermon, "Marks of the New Birth," Wesley says that assurance of faith is primarily about the Spirit of God bearing witness in our spirit and secondarily about the testimony of our conscience. Thus, one does need the testimony of his or her conscience, but it is the Spirit of God that ultimately gives the assurance that one really is a child of God (Wesley and Burwash 176-7) Wesley refers to Romans 8:16-17 when discussing the primary means of assurance. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (NIV). Assurance of salvation was more than a matter of fact for Wesley, it was a deeply seated feeling (or a type of knowing) that one is a co-heir with Christ, a true child of God who is fully loved

and accepted. When discussing the witness of God's Spirit in his sermons called

"Witness of the Spirit," Wesley echoes the emotional nature of his understanding:

The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out and I, even, I, am reconciled to God (Wesley and Burwash 95).

For Wesley, the witness of the spirit was inextricably tied to assurance of salvation.

Assurance was more than a mystical or mysterious experience. Assurance was something that one could have full confidence in.

Placing discipleship as the number one priority in life. John Wesley declared that the life of a disciple did not include a medium point. Discipleship for him was an all-or-none endeavor that required full devotion to Jesus:

I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil. Can any serious person doubt of this, or find a medium between serving God and serving the devil? (Plain Account 9-10)

A disciple has no commitment, priority, or allegiance that would trump loyalty to Jesus. Following Jesus comes before self, family, and possessions. In fact, followers of Jesus are called to save their lives by giving them away to Jesus (Mark 8:34-9:1). "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Those who want to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for me will find it'" (Matt. 16:24-5, NIV). The true life of a committed disciple is found only in Jesus. The promise of being a disciple is not one of comfort or nirvana. The promise also includes self-denial, sacrifice, and obedience in the name of Jesus. The phrase "deny themselves" points to the need for true disciples to turn

away from fulfilling their own needs and towards fulfilling God's needs. The phrase "take up their cross" points to a true disciples' willingness to follow Jesus even through times of suffering and pain. The phrase "follow me" points to the obedience of the disciple. These three things bring life because they allow disciples to lose their own lives, turning them over to God. When disciples turn their lives over to God, they keep no part for themselves. The promise of this 100 percent relinquishment of self is life but not just any life. It is a life hidden in God and rich with the things of heaven, not one rich with the things of this world (Barclay, 5: 151-53; Walvoord and Zuck 58-59). It is an abundant life. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus calls would-be followers to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" in comparison to seeking the things of this world (NLT). Finally, Jesus says in Luke 14:33 that those who do not give up everything they have cannot be his disciples.

Discipleship is ultimately not about individuals; it is about God-his purposes, plans, and expectations for their lives. Being a disciple, by definition, has to be the one priority in a disciple's life.

Obeying God's laws and commands. Professing allegiance to Jesus is one thing; proving allegiance through actions that are consistent with the teachings of Jesus is another. The latter requires obedience to God's laws and commands. These laws and commands are found in the Old Testament and are fulfilled by the life and teachings of Jesus and the subsequent teaching of the New Testament writers (Matt. 5:17-18). Greatest among these laws is to love God and love neighbor. All other laws and commands are circumscribed by these two commandments, according to Jesus (Matt. 22:34-40).

Jesus confronted this difference between professing allegiance and proving allegiance through actions during his ministry in Judea. Some Jews paid attention to Jesus' words without committing themselves to him personally (John 6:43-59). John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck write, "[I]t was possible to 'believe' in the message of repentance and the coming kingdom without being born again" (304-05). Jesus' response to this dilemma was rather simple. He said, "If you hold to [emphasis mine] my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31, NIV). A clear link between obedience and discipleship is made here. Real disciples, those who actually follow Jesus and do not only give the idea lip service, are called to "hold to" Jesus' teaching. The sense of "hold to" presents the idea that no follower is perfect but that every follower should willingly strive to live in harmony with God's laws and commands. The idea of "holding to" something can also be expressed with the phrase "remain in" when used regarding a relationship with Jesus. This "remaining" does not allow for wishful thinking to be honored when applied to discipleship. Discipleship is not about mental ascent but active following. William Barclay writes that "holding to" or "remaining in" Jesus' teaching involves four acts from the disciple. It involves the acts of constant listening to the word of Jesus, constant learning from Jesus, constant penetrating into the truth the words of Jesus bear, and constant obeying the word of Jesus (John 20 and 2). The idea of "holding to" underlines followers who are serious about the laws and commands, trying their best to hold something and remain in the flow of something that easily slips away (Barclay).

The ideal of obedience to God's laws and commands for the disciple of Jesus was expressed by Wesley and early Methodists as Christian perfection. Wesley's doctrine of

Christian perfection was not quite what one would assume at first glance. Wesley himself said, “The word perfect is what many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them. And hence some have advised, wholly to lay aside the use of those expressions.. But are they not found in the oracles of God?” (Wesley and Burwash 405) John 3:9 is one of the scriptural passages where Wesley found support for Christian perfection. It reads, “Those who have been born into God's family do not sin, because God’s life is in them. So they can’t keep on sinning, because they have been born of God (NLT). He did not mean to imply that a follower of Jesus could live a perfect life free from infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes. However, he did mean that a follower of Jesus could live with perfect intent as to the love of God and neighbor. Wesley answers the question, “What is Christian perfection?” in his book A Plain Account of Christian Perfection: “The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words and actions, are governed by pure love” (51). Christian perfection, or loving with perfect intent, is to be experienced as a gift of God’s grace in the life of the believer. It is obtained through obedience to God’s laws and commands, but it is not a matter of works righteousness. Christian perfection is rather a gift from God that comes by means of grace. The means of grace are rooted in a love for God and neighbor and led by the Holy Spirit (Langford 39-43; Wesley and Burwash 400-20; Wesley, Plain Account 51-2). The means of grace are channels that allow God’s grace to work in the life of a disciple in such a way that the disciple is equipped to live a life of loving and trusting obedience to God.

Representing God in the world. Disciples are called to represent God. They are called to be a light in the darkness. They do not run from the darkness but live in its

midst, shining the light of Jesus upon it. When talking to followers Jesus asked them to intentionally let others know of their faith:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:14-16)

Being a disciple certainly means letting those around you know that you are a disciple, but it also means taking the witness one step further and intentionally placing that witness on a stand for all to see.

In addition to this very lucid image of light, disciples also function as representatives of Jesus in the following ways. Disciples are ambassadors representing Christ to the world (2 Cor. 5:20). Disciples are the body of Christ. Disciples are called to be the incarnation of Jesus to the world, representing his eternal ministry in the here and now (1 Cor. 12:27). One writer eloquently speaks of the connection between Jesus and the Church when he writes, “The Church is the extension of [Christ’s] incarnation. A local church is the manifestation of Christ in its community” (Chaney and Lewis 20). Representing God in the world also means serving and caring for others.

Serving and caring for others. In his book Surprising Insights from the Unchurched, Rainer reports, after extensive research, that the second most important reason unchurched people choose a church behind doctrine is “people caring for each other” (70-73). Unchurched people in America intuitively recognize the demands of discipleship for the believing church attendee. Serving others for God’s glory is discipleship: “The purpose of discipleship is to help Christians become transformed individuals who imitate Christ daily. Jesus’ life was about selfless love of others—a life

devoted to serving people” (Barna 22). Teaching the first twelve disciples Jesus noted, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26-8). In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), Jesus clearly demonstrated that his followers are not to be about seeking status, fulfilling religious duty, or worrying about the things of this world. His followers are supposed to serve those in need simply because they are in need and the opportunity presented itself. This parable is an object lesson for explaining what Jesus calls the second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

When the first group of Christians began to meet together after Pentecost, the Bible says that they were committed to each other in a very significant way. The picture is not one of a social or hobby group but of people who were deeply committed to serving and caring for each other. These first followers of Jesus were devoted to fellowship, were together, had everything in common, sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need, continued to meet together in the temple courts, broke bread in their homes, and ate together (Act 2:42-47; Hull, Disciple Making Church 65-68). They worked collectively from the context of time spent together to meet the needs of those who were needy.

One of the many outpourings of John Wesley’s leadership in making disciples was that a disciple is one who has a practical faith. During Wesley’s lifetime he moved from the white collar world of the Oxford ivory tower to the factories and blue collar neighborhoods of rural England, in part, because he believed in a faith that had a real and viable transformative effect apart from any doctrine or creed. For Wesley, holiness was

the love of God and the love of neighbor. Just as Jesus mentions them side-by-side, the two loves were coequal for Wesley. Loving neighbor meant loving God and loving God meant loving neighbor (Langford 25-27; Stokes, Our Methodist Heritage 45-54; Scriptural Holiness 35-40).

Being trained by God's word. For Wesley, the Scriptures were the prime source of theology, and the Scriptures came alive through the power of the Holy Spirit (Langford 25-27). As Mack B. Stokes writes, Wesley did not understand faith as cold intellectualism or lifeless formalism. Faith is better understood as an experience of God's grace that is rooted in Scripture (Our Methodist Heritage 39-54). God's word constantly trains the active disciple as he or she grows in faith: "In order to have a healthy formation or spiritual development, all believers need the nourishment and training of Scripture" (Hull, Disciple Making Church 65). Wesley understood the Bible as a launching pad for ministry, not an object for debate or a rulebook for doctrine:

Theology, he reasoned, has a practical goal: Christian truth must be applied to both personal and social life. Doctrine is for the purpose of Christian nurture and service. Wesley insisted that theology must carry practical import. Under-girding preaching, worship, and love of neighbor, Christian doctrine helps effect a thorough transformation of life. The task of theology is to interpret the gracious presence of God rightly and apply it effectively. (Langford 27)

The highly committed disciple, then, is called to do more than simply react to what they have already learned.

In terms of spiritual growth and training by God's word, the journey of Christian faith has no place of arrival in this lifetime. Just like a body, the nature of discipleship is not static. Discipleship requires constant attention if it is to have any efficacy. As Paul says in Romans 7, disciples must "work out" their salvation continually. Disciples must

be open to applying new knowledge about the kingdom of God to their lives. This new knowledge must be rooted in God's word if it is to reflect the kingdom of God accurately:

“It is imperative that anyone who wishes to be a disciple commit to gaining insight into the nature and substance of the Christian faith and work toward a total integration of the principles of that faith in his or her life. (Barna 21)”

The total integration of Bible knowledge into every aspect of the believers life is more than one big beginning decision; it is a lifetime of small decisions.

Maintaining intimacy with God. Committed disciples of Jesus are those who live in such a way that they constantly form relationships with God. Although not exhaustive in terms of means for spiritual growth, three primary ways to maintain intimacy with God are worship, prayer, and Bible study. These acts primarily serve as the foundational elements for brave acts of obedience like service, evangelism, justice, and life change. Other spiritual disciplines are also strategic in the life of a disciple. Wesley called these practices “means of grace.” He noted that they did not guarantee the Spirit's work within the disciple but only opened the disciple to being available to a movement of the Spirit at the time of the Spirit's choosing. The particular program or discipline for developing intimacy does not matter as much as the work of the Spirit (Wesley and Burwash 149-62). The literature shows that a disciple maintains this intimacy through at least three means: worship, prayer, and scripture.

A disciple is one who is committed to worship. Worship is a word commonly coupled with the word service in American culture. A common view of the worship service is that it is a place where people go to get something from God as though something is being served to them. Other phrases like maid service, food service, and repair service come to mind when thinking about this popular misconception of worship.

Worship is actually just the opposite of getting anything. Marva J. Dawn and Robert E. Webber both agree that worship “ought not be construed in a utilitarian way.” Dawn and Webber also agree that the proper question has less to do with what the worshipper will accomplish in worship and more to do with whom the worshipper represents in worship. Worship represents Jesus Christ. It tells and acts out the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. It celebrates Christ’s victory over death and evil and the promise of the “here” but “not yet fully present” coming kingdom of God (Dawn 1; Webber 38).

Through acts of worship, God’s people are called to honor him, to show his worth, to place him in the proper place in their lives. In fact, the English word worship is a shortened word derived from the word *worship*, which means “to attribute worth” to something. The New Testament gives many examples of ways that a disciple can attribute this worth to God. A disciple can sing praises to God, learn about and read God’s Word, share in Holy Communion, remember the acts of Jesus, and even minister to others (Kimball 113-15). Corporate worship is certainly an adequate setting for authentic worship, but it is not the only place.

Certainly the disciple is called to times of corporate worship that include instruction from God’s Word, singing, prayer, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and individual participation (1 Cor. 11:17-26; 14:26), but disciples are also called to worship God with 100 percent of who they are and what they do (Rom. 12:1-2).

A disciple is one who is committed to prayer. When the first Church formed after Pentecost, one of the primary functions of a follower of Jesus was to pray. Prayer was held up as a coequal partner along with learning, fellowship, and communion. E. M.

Bounds writes, “The men who have most fully illustrated Christ in their character, and have most powerfully affected the world for Him, have been men who have spent so much time with God as to make it a notable feature in their lives” (99). Prayer is a primary way for spending time with God (i.e., maintaining intimacy).

The New Testament is full of words that relate to prayer. One word is *proseuchomai*, which means to pray or entreat. Its verb form, *proseuche*, is found eighty-seven times in the New Testament pointing to the fervent prayer life of Jesus and his disciples. Other words are *euchomai* referring to a vow, *euche* referring to an oath, *aiteo* meaning to ask for something, *deomai* meaning to request a need to be met, *erotao* referring to asking questions of God, and *entynchano* referring to the prayer act of intercession (Richards 498-99). These words clearly describe prayer as an expression of a relationship. Prayer is not primarily a liturgical or ritualistic endeavor; rather, it is an endeavor that maintains and develops intimacy with God. “Prayer is an expression of relationship and must always be understood as an expression of fellowship between God and human beings, made possible by Jesus” (499).

Jesus not only modeled prayer; he called his followers to it as well. In fact one can say that he almost assumed his followers would be about the business of prayer. In Matthew 6:5 Jesus says, “And when you pray,” giving his followers a clear expectation for praying frequently.

A disciple is one who is committed to Scripture. If disciples are to be obedient to God’s laws and commands, they must first discover them in Scripture. If disciples are to gain intimacy with God, they must not only discover the cognitive knowledge of Scripture. They must also allow Scripture to guide them. Paul writes in 2 Timothy, “All

Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (3:16, NIV). Scripture has a life beyond factual data or storytelling or good poetry. It is useful for practical guidance in the faith and is, therefore, useful for maintaining a relationship with God.

Making new disciples. Disciples of Jesus are characterized by intentional outreach—also called faith-sharing, evangelism, witnessing, or telling the good news. Whatever the term, the Bible clearly calls disciples to make new disciples.

Matheteuo, the primary verb in Jesus great commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is translated “make disciples.” It is supported by three participles: *poreuo* (“going”), *baptizso* (“baptizing”) and *didasko* (“teaching”). Therefore, a disciple is to go, baptize, and teach.

“Going” is closely related to the phrase “as you are going.” Jesus is calling the disciples to make new disciples wherever they happen to be.

“Baptizing” represents the initiation rite into the family of God and the Church. It is essential for committed discipleship and for making new disciples.

“Teaching” is an ongoing process throughout the life of the disciple. The new disciple must be taught to obey the command to make new disciples among many others.

Committed disciples not only adhere to the faith but also intentionally invite others to participate in that faith by reaching out to people who are not disciples, by baptizing new believers and by training them to become obedient disciples themselves.

Stewarding God’s resources. Committed disciples come to a point in their journey where they realize God is not only the creator of the universe and the giver of abundant life but that he literally owns everything: “For all the animals of the forest are

mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not mention it to you, for all the world is mine, and everything in it” (Ps. 50:10, 12, NLT). Disciples recognize themselves as stewards of property that ultimately belongs to someone else. The concept of stewardship certainly applies to financial matters because God owns all money, but it is also more broad than financial stewardship. It includes family, friends, career, goals, etc. Mature followers of Jesus ask questions about how they are using everything they have at their disposal for the glory of God. “Everything at their disposal” includes the beautiful characteristics they have such as intellect, beauty, athleticism, and wealth. It also includes the varying life situations that people might not consider gifts such as poverty, sacrifice, singleness, parenting a disabled child, or personal weaknesses.

Wesley considered stewardship central to the life of a disciple. He called Christians to approach wealth in a radical departure from the surrounding world. He constantly warned early Methodists about the danger of wealth. His concern was twofold. On the one hand he felt that the desire for wealth leads one to subtly trust in wealth instead of the creator. On the other hand he believed the desire to obtain or hold onto wealth would impede our ability to love our neighbor truly. Wesley’s radical call to stewardship contains a definition of unholy wealth as possessing more of the goods of this world than could be used in accordance with the will of God. He believed that all one owns, including all of his or her wealth, must be used in the service of God’s purposes (Knight 89-90).

Framework Two—The Process of Membership

Framework two has to do with how one becomes a member of a local church. This section focuses upon the historical strategies for creating churches with fully

functioning members and highly committed disciples. It examines relevant literature in the areas of membership *requirements*, initiation *rites* as they relate to membership, and membership *preparation* or catechism. Attention is given to the early Church and to subsequent developments, the Wesleyan movement, early Methodism, the current understanding of membership in the United Methodist Church, and existing “high expectation” church trends.

Membership Process Development in the Early Church and Beyond

On the day of Pentecost, the first church was born. Acts 2:41 reports that “those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church.” The very first acts of membership in the Christian Church were inseparably tied to baptism. The offer that preceded baptism was to “turn from sins and turn toward God” (Acts 2:38). In the earliest accounts of entrance into the family of God, little preparation existed, however, the entrance was accompanied by profound personal transformation and baptism.

Requirements and rites. The sacrament of baptism, taking various forms but maintaining the same essence, was the requirement and rite of membership into the early Christian Church. “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body” (1 Cor. 12:13). Little separation existed between the sacrament of baptism and recognition as a member of the early Christian Church (Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* 152; Latourette 118). “Just as circumcision had marked the transaction between God’s gracious initiative in Old Testament days and man’s trusting and obedient response, so baptism signified entry into the Christian society” (Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* 152). Herbert Jedin refers to the early Church’s separation from its Jewish heritage:

Certain tendencies are observable, however, which were later to lead to independent forms of piety and ritual. Such a new liturgical act was

baptism, the basis of membership in the community. And this was not just the taking over of the baptism of John, for it was unequivocally done “in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (ac. 2:38). Jesus as a person was the center of the liturgical act. From Jesus, baptism got its supernatural efficacy: forgiveness of sins and entry into the community of the faithful. (16)

If one was being prepared for membership, then one was being prepared to assume the vows of baptism authentically, thus leading to committed discipleship that included an assumption of fully functioning membership in a local “body of Christ.”

Preparation. In the first years of the early Church, baptism happened very quickly after a profession of faith in Jesus and repentance of sins. The Philippian jailer was baptized without instruction or delay as was Paul and the Ethiopian eunuch (Green, Evangelism—Now and Then 154). Even with a very brief period of time between belief and baptism, periods of preparation were normative. The sacrament of baptism was not administered without consent and understanding on the part of the new adherent. The preparation may have been a sermon as on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the witness of believers coupled with the singing of hymns and miracles as with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), a direct word from the risen Christ as with Paul (Acts 9), or a Spirit-directed conversation as with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). Although not formalized, preparation for baptism and membership in the early Church was certainly present. In this sense, Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 served as the initial catechism for these very first new believers. As James Hastings writes, “It can hardly be supposed that any one can at any time have been admitted into the Church without some sort of profession of faith, and this would imply some previous instruction” (251).

Nevertheless, the biblical and extra-biblical texts clearly show that the approach to preparation for baptism and membership quickly became more formalized and

systematic (Ferguson 223; Green, Evangelism in the Early Church 154; Hastings 251; Marthaler 227-28).

Borrowing from the work of P. Carrington and E. G. Selwyn, Michael Green highlights a possible catechism framework found in the writings of Paul, Peter, and James. (Evangelism in the Early Church 154; Evangelism—Now and Then 87). The fourfold instruction that Green refers to is as follows: (1) “*desponentes* (e.g., Latin)—the putting off of the old evil nature” (Col. 3:9; Eph. 4:22; 1 Pet. 2:1; Jas. 1:21); (2) “*subjecti*—proper Christian submission in various areas of political and social life” (Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:24; 5:22; 1 Pet. 2:13; 5:9; Jas. 4:7); (3) “*vigilate*—the charge to watch and pray” (Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; Jas. 5:16); and (4) “*resistite*—the need for standing firm in the faith and resisting the assaults of the devil” (Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:11; 1 Pet 5:8-9; Jas. 4:7).

Some scholars also believe that 1 Peter may have been an entire message written for the occasion of baptism. Whether these biblical examples of catechetical training were used prior to or following baptism is unclear (Green, Evangelism in the Early Church 154; Evangelism—Now and Then 88).

Ancient Formalization of the Membership Process

Moving forward from these very early forms of membership preparation through catechetical training for baptism, one finds that more formalized approaches were developed quickly (Hastings 251). As methods of instruction became more formalized, the catechetical teaching was to be practiced as preparation for baptism, not following it (251-52). With the fall of Jerusalem, the fire in Rome and subsequent persecution of Christians, and the deaths of many first generation Christian leaders, a new

urgency to centralize and standardize church structures emerged. Part of this effort led to the formation of gospels that recounted the life and ministry of Jesus. These documents came into existence within a decade or so on either side of AD 70 (Lightfoot and Harmer 8-9). This realization leads one to suspect that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as known today were written, at least in part, as catechetical teachings for future generations of Christians before these gospels became part of the normative canon of Scripture.

The earliest formalized documents written specifically for baptismal preparation and membership are the “*Doctrina*” and the “*Didache*” (Goodspeed 1-18). Edgar J. Goodspeed comments upon the documents:

Over against Paul’s bold doctrine of the all-sufficiency of faith,... Christians more of the Jewish tradition thought it necessary to draw up a set of rules of conduct, which would make the Christians’ practical moral obligations more definite... But it is totally lacking in art or genius, and seems to attempt to foist the essence of the old legalism upon the new religion, reducing its living faith to the keeping of a set of rules. (1)

The “*Didache*” is built upon earlier manuscripts such as Matthew, Luke-Acts, 1 Peter, and Hermas. Goodspeed introduces it as a “brief handbook that regulated church rites and practices before agreement had been reached as to what books should be read in church” (9). The two basic parts of The “*Didache*” are the beginning section (1:1-5:2) that focuses upon the moral and ethical duties of a follower of Jesus and the ending section (6:1-16:8) that gives authoritative directions about the practice, structure, order, and discipline for a body of believers (45). Green notes that even with documents such as the “*Didache*” in place, little evidence of organized preparation for baptism exists in the early Church (Evangelism in the Early Church 154).

In light of Goodspeed's criticism of the "*Doctrina*" and the "*Didache*," the environment in which these documents were prepared must also be noted. During the first century of the Christian Church, mystery religions had turned initiation rites into "magical means of entry into the community of the saved" and no moral or ethical demands were placed upon the initiate (Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* 155). In Christianity these moral and ethical demands were absolutely essential; thus, a method for teaching them prior to entry into the community of the saved was sought.

As Christian persecution became more than isolated incidences of injustice, extreme caution surrounded the initiation and admittance of new baptized members. Though details vary, during this time period (AD 70 and beyond), catechetical training took on a more lengthy and organized form (Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* 155; Lightfoot and Harmer 4-12). One example of this training is an organized catechumenate set forth by Hippolytus that called for three years of instruction before baptism, though, *Hippolytus* qualified the program by explaining, "it is not the time that is judged, but the conduct" (Ferguson 224).

Following Augustine's lead, four distinct levels of catechetical education can be distinguished by the fourth century: The first is teaching for inquirers. The second was a teaching period for the catechumenate proper for which specific rites of admission varied locally. The third level was the immediate preparation for baptism that typically occurred in the forty days before the Pasch. This time was for instruction but also for fasting, penitence, and confession. The fourth was actually a period following baptism where the meaning of the sacraments was taught. This process, designed for adults, began to decline in the fifth and sixth centuries due to the spread of infant baptism. This prepared the way

for teaching in later centuries that would be specifically prepared for children who had been baptized as infants (Ferguson 224).

Over the centuries, many notable manuals for the instruction of Christians have been developed. During the Reformation period, these manuals flourished. They include Luther's catechisms (1529), the catechism incorporated into the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (1549), the Heidelberg catechism (1563), and the Westminster catechisms (1647) (Harmon 425; Hastings 251-56; Smith 186). "The Protestant catechisms became in a sense popular denominational Confessions of Faith" (Harmon 425). By the fifteenth century the term catechism was popularly applied to the instruction of children after their baptism as infants. These documents were most likely used by educated clergy in preparing their instruction for parishioners who could not read, instead of by the parishioners themselves (Hastings 252).

Membership Process in the Wesleyan Movement

The Wesleyan movement was a revival movement rising up out of the Church of England that would ultimately be formed into a separate church by necessity. As Holland N. McTyeire points out, the first goal was not structure, but piety:

It was not new doctrine but new life the first Methodists sought for themselves and for others. To realize in the hearts and conduct of men a true ideal of Christianity, to maintain its personal experience, and to extend it-this was their design; and their system of government grew up out of this, and was accordingly shaped by it. (13)

The movement would continue its existence because of the clear mission of affecting the lives of millions of people around the globe. In the following paragraphs, I focus on salient historical aspects of the Wesleyan movement that inform early views of membership.

To understand the membership process in the context of the Wesleyan movement, one must first understand that the Wesleyan movement was indeed a movement. There was no “membership” in the early Wesleyan movement per se, but clear and definite requirements for continued participation in the early ministry structures of the Wesleyan movement did exist.

Although the movement would not take on a life of its own until after Wesley’s missionary journey to Georgia, his Aldersgate experience, and the journey of George Whitefield to America, it started as a “holy club” on the campus of Oxford University. On this campus, a handful of students went about the Christian life in a very serious, methodical, and practical way. Their devotion surpassed all other groups on campus, and they were first called Methodists as a jeering and derogatory commentary from agitated peers (McTyeire 54-62).

Wesley’s early driving passion was “a burning desire to revitalize the church” and build “a model Christian community in one Anglican parish” (Baker 52). This passion led Wesley on his missionary journey to Georgia under the supervision of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. While on board the ship to America, he came into contact with Moravian missionaries and was so impressed with their piety, good works, seriousness, and humility that he stayed in contact with them, including August Spangenberg, while in Georgia. One incident on the ship explains, at least in part, Wesley’s interest with the Moravian way of life and faith. In his journal, Wesley writes about how the Moravians responded to a storm that caused him to fear for his life:

At noon our third storm began. At four it was more violent than before. The ship not only rocked to and fro with the utmost violence, but shook and jarred with so unequal, grating a motion, that one could not but with

great difficulty keep one's hold of any thing, nor stand a moment without it. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterward, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no." I asked, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied mildly, "No; our women and children are not afraid to die." From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not. At twelve the wind fell. This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen. (Cornuck 20)

The Moravian impact on Wesley was tremendous for he left Georgia two years later as a failure in the mission field but also knowing that he "lacked inward peace of soul" (Snyder, Radical Wesley 21-22). The encounter between Wesley and the Moravians in the storm on 25 January 1736 must have helped him establish what would become the Wesleyan tradition of a practical faith that helped interpret and was informed by Scripture.

Once back in London, Wesley befriended a young Moravian missionary named Peter Bohler with whom he would entrust the care of his soul (Cornuck 26). On 26 April, 1738, after visiting with Wesley, Bohler writes, "He wept bitterly and asked me to pray with him. I can freely affirm, that he is a poor, broken-hearted sinner, hungering after a better righteousness" (qtd. in Cornuck 26). Then on May 24, 1738, Wesley had his famous Aldersgate experience where he reports, "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and assurance was given me from the law of sin and death (qtd in Cornuck 476)."

This newfound faith in Christ happened in the context of a "religious society" with only a few other men that functioned similarly to a modern small group:

Wesley now had a newfound assurance of faith, a supportive group to share his life with and an expanding preaching ministry. Now finally, he saw that his long-standing dream of a real restoration of primitive

Christianity within the Church of England was possible. (Snyder, Radical Wesley 28)

With the “society” experiences and the instructions from Moravian missionaries, the genius and spirit of Methodism was poised to have a worldwide impact, but Wesley only understood it as renewal of the Church of England in these early stages (Norwood, Church Membership 46-78, Story of American Methodism 23-40; McTyeire 20-56; Snyder, Radical Wesley 67-90). A vital bridge would be crossed when Wesley’s passion for the Church and its revival through society meetings was coupled with the open-air preaching to the poor by George Whitefield. On 17 February 1739 Whitefield preached in the open-air to about two hundred coal miners in Kingswood. Three weeks later the number had mushroomed to nearly ten thousand and Whitefield called on Wesley for help (Snyder, Radical Wesley 31). Wesley’s genius was that he would organize crowds, such as the one created in Kingswood, into manageable groups that would instruct further discipleship beyond the initial decision of repentance and faith. He was more interested in the time after decision than with the efforts leading up to it (2). This system of groups had three parts—societies, bands, and classes (34-38). Each group had its own unique character with different requirements and expectations for membership (Werlein 22-28). A new movement that would impact millions of souls for Christ was launched.

Societies. As numbers of new converts became unmanageably large to visit individually in their homes, Wesley extended invitations to new converts to meet together in “society meetings” (Snyder, Radical Wesley 34). Wesley describes the nature of a society meeting and terms for membership in early writings:

Thus arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterwards called a *Society* [original emphasis]; a very innocent name, and very common in London, for any number of people associating themselves

together... They therefore united themselves “in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.” There is only one condition previously required in those who desire admission into this society, - “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.” (Wesley, Wesley’s Works 250)

In addition to the one primary desire for admission in a society, it was also necessary to believe in certain presuppositions that centered upon historic trinitarian Christianity .

Those desiring to be part of a society were required to believe in God, the power of Scripture, and Jesus as redeemer (Norwood, Church Membership 28). Four points were employed in urging people to join the societies:

1. Orthodoxy, or right opinion, is not nearly so important as inward righteousness;
 2. The only way to begin is to “repent and believe the Gospel”;
 3. One is justified freely by grace through Jesus Christ;
 4. Being justified, we continue to live the Christian life, holy and happy.
- (28)

Lastly, Wesley did not want doctrine to be a barrier to membership in the societies. In The Character of a Methodist, Wesley writes, “As to opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think” (1).

Remembering that these societies were small groups meeting under the umbrella of the larger Church of England, Wesley considered members of the societies as always on probation. Full membership did not mean permanent membership. Persistence in faithfulness to God and attendance at the meetings was essential for ongoing membership in a society (Norwood, Church Membership 30).

Bands and classes. The most direct mark of Moravian influence upon Wesley, bands were developed as an extension ministry of societies and were organized for those who “wanted to pour out their hearts without reserve, particularly with regard to the sin

which did still easily beset them, and the temptations which were most apt to prevail over them” (qtd in Snyder, Radical Wesley 35). Bands had as a primary purpose the mandate of James: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (5:16, NIV). Small groups of five to ten people organized by age, gender, and marital status, band members answered the following questions weekly:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not? (Wesley, Wesley’s Works 273)

Bands, being very intense and asking for a kind of openness uncommon among people, never gained the popularity for which Wesley had hoped (Henderson 45).

Wesley’s response to this dilemma was the “class meeting.” Just as with societies, class leaders were originally to visit the members in their homes, but individual visitation soon proved too time consuming and complicated. Thus, the decision was made to bring class members together for group meetings (Snyder, Radical Wesley 37). These Methodist class meetings proved to be “the backbone of the Methodist reformation for the next century” (Henderson 28). Wesley believed that bands and classes were instrumental tools for personal spiritual growth:

Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to “bear one another’s burdens,” and naturally to “care for each other.” As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And “speaking the truth in love,” they grew into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ. (Wesley, Wesley’s Works 254)

Over time, rules were developed for membership in the society that were contingent upon membership in a class or band. Tickets were given out quarterly to those who had persisted in attendance and Christian growth. These tickets were good for attending the

societies that were larger worship environments and served as a place for participating in Holy Communion (or the Love Feast) (Snyder, Radical Wesley 57).

Although no formal arrangement for membership existed during this early period of the Wesleyan movement before the historic decision in 1784, expectations and concerted attempts to make sure that attendance was taken seriously were present in the polity of early Methodist gatherings of faith. The initial invitation was not on the order of a catechism as one might suppose, but it did carry with it instruction, however brief, and the character of a vow to be carried out as a member of the group. Failure to carry out that vow brought with it necessary removal from continued membership in a band, society, or class. On the horizon of this movement was the unexpected formation of a new Church that would stand separated from the Church of England.

Membership Process in the Early Methodist Church

After the historic decision to ordain Methodist pastors at the Christmas Conference in 1784, the Methodist movement began to take upon itself the likeness of a more organized and institutional church. The earliest accounts of membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church carry two important qualities that would at first appear contradictory but nevertheless worked side by side toward the goal of creating a church with fully functioning members and highly committed disciples.

The first quality is the primacy of baptism for membership. Frederick A. Norwood writes, “Wesley omitted in his service book any form for reception into church membership... Instead he relied entirely on the strong ecclesiastical implications of the service of baptism” (Story of American Methodism 102). The second quality is the tradition of a probationary period before being accepted as a full member in the church.

The Discipline of 1785 provided for a two months' probation period. This period was extended to six months in the 1788 Discipline. Baptism was an assumed precondition for entering into this probationary period. Membership came after probationers exhibited their forthrightness in carrying out the vows of baptism in everyday life (Church Membership 34-35).

Rather strict adherence to this "baptism/probation period" formula for membership was practiced during the first seven or eight decades of the Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1876 the Methodist Episcopal General Conference was deluged with requests for either a reduction in the terms of probation or its complete abolition. Not until the General Conference of 1908 in the north was a stipulation for a minimum term of probation eliminated. The minimum term of probation was not eliminated until 1939 in the south (Norwood, Church Membership 35-41).

Norwood summarizes changes in membership in the early Methodist Church in the following fashion:

The long history of probation for membership has gone through three main stages: (1) a period during the time of John Wesley in which preparation for membership was assumed and strict control was exercised over final acceptance into the societies, but in which no formal definition of status was attempted and no member was ever really out of probation; (2) a period marked especially in early American Methodism in which the condition of probationary membership was legalistically defined as to term and extent, and every candidate, adult or juvenile, was required to go through a period of trial and training;; and (3) a period of progressive relaxation of the conditions for preparatory membership without complete abandonment of the principle itself. (Church Membership 41)

The functional memory of this profound period in the Methodist movement has all but been erased in today's modern United Methodist Church.

Membership Process in the Modern United Methodist Church

Membership in the United Methodist Church is understood in the context of “the church universal” (Olsen, Book of Discipline—1996 122). One who becomes a member in a United Methodist Church is also considered a member in the larger, worldwide body of Christ referred to as the holy catholic church in the Apostles’ Creed. This church is “composed of all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior” (122). Furthermore, the United Methodist Church holds that this membership is open to persons of all ages, nations, and races.

Requirements. The requirements for membership in the United Methodist Church center upon the dual aspects of baptism and membership vows but lack any centralized or normalized approach to catechetical training or a probationary period. Nevertheless, the current understanding of membership as highlighted by the review of literature does retain a certain amount of character and integrity.

First, baptism is intricately linked with membership. (Olsen, Book of Discipline—1996 233; Custer 46-57; Sheets 80-91; Stokes, Methodist Heritage 15-33; Tuell 43-77). Just as physical birth brings a person into a particular family, baptism also brings one into a particular family, the worldwide church of all those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. In this way baptism brings one not only into a new relationship with God but also with others in the family of God, or to borrow from Pauline imagery, the body of Christ (Custer 62; Sheets 7). The United Methodist Book of Worship contains no liturgy specifically pertaining to membership vows. This language can be found only in the context of the services of the baptismal covenant, thus positioning baptism as a condition of membership (Alexander 81-111).

Second, to become a member in a local United Methodist church, a person is required to take certain vows; however, different variations of the membership vows for United Methodists exist. All of the vows point toward becoming fully functioning members and highly committed disciples, but they are phrased differently and vary in length.

The Book of Discipline—2000 suggests that the following seven vows are necessary for membership. New members promise

1. To renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of their sin;
2. To accept the freedom and power God gives them to resist evil, injustice, and oppression;
3. To confess Jesus Christ as Savior, put their whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as their Lord;
4. To remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world;
5. To be loyal to the United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries;
6. To participate faithfully in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, and their service; and,
7. To receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Olsen 324).

Other sources present variations of these themes. Echoing number six, the following question is asked of newly baptized candidates for membership in the Baptismal

Covenant Service II of the UM Book of Worship: “As members of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service?” (Alexander 58). Other sources echo this fourfold response as a requirement for membership. The fourfold response is generally accepted as the measure of member performance among United Methodist authors. (Bales 67; Custer 79; Kerr 43; Thurston 22; Tuell 47).

Surprisingly, other membership vow formulas can be found in other official United Methodist literature. In A Dictionary for United Methodists by Alan K. Waltz, the following membership vows are found: “to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; to believe in the Christian faith as contained in the Old and New Testaments; to promise to live a Christian life; and to uphold The United Methodist Church with one’s prayers, presence, gifts, and service” (67). Obviously, these vows have the same spirit as other lists but are phrased differently. Older and differently phrased formulas can be found in early hymnals and rituals.

To summarize a review of the membership requirements in the modern United Methodist Church, clearly baptism is essentially linked to membership. Traditions for specific membership vows are coherent but not standardized in the sense that ordained pastors follow a strict formula when accepting new United Methodist members into their congregations. The vows of membership encompass both theological understandings of the UM position in regards to a relationship with God and the commitment to future action in regards to the practice of membership.

Rites. Literature, including the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church is almost void of any particular method for joining a United Methodist Church.

The Book of Discipline—2000 speaks of “assuming the vows” (Olsen par. 214). Other literature adds the suggestion that the vows be assumed in front of the congregation and administered by the pastor (Custer 64; Thurston 25; Tuell 49). These appear to be the only “official” guidelines.

Preparation. Books about being United Methodist are available, but little material exists that informs a systematic approach to preparation for membership outside of confirmation materials designed for young people.

In regards to young people, the pastor of a Methodist church is called annually to lead youth through a course of study that prepares them for confirmation of the baptism they received as infants. In regards to adults, the literature review discovers that advice given to pastors is to prepare all people for baptism by explaining its theological significance (Olsen, Book of Discipline—2000 par. 225). No call comes, however, for an organized effort to train adults through an educational system that would specifically contribute to fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship. The literature assumes that the call of baptism and the practice of the ensuing Christian lifestyle is enough to inform the new member adequately before joining. The literature contains some references to the need for adequate training but outlines no prescribed course or catechism for doing so (Ammons 15-102; Bales 8-96; Custer 36-202; Elford 6-134; Frank 15-107; Kerr 56-94; Koehler 31-67; Thurston 12-90; Tuell 3-172).

Where a systematic approach to learning about membership is available the material takes a rather vague approach to its own usage. The material does not define itself as necessary information before making the commitment to join but instead presents itself as necessary information for becoming a good member. The teaching materials also

focus more on historical and theological facts than the practical aspects of being a member (Ammons 15-102; Bales 8-96; Custer 36-202; Elford 6-134; Frank 15-107; Kerr 56-94; Koehler 31-67; Thurston 12-90; Tuell 3-172).

In summary, membership in the United Methodist Church of today is loosely understood as a commitment based on the acceptance of baptism and the assuming of certain vows in similar but varied forms. Explicit advice for preparation for membership is limited to young people and the confirmation process. The pastor is asked to oversee confirmation at least yearly.

These findings validate my own experiences as a United Methodist pastor. Membership is a much discussed topic among my colleagues, but rarely have I found a pastor with an intentional process specifically designed to help adults become fully functioning members and highly committed disciples as they assume the membership vows.

Membership Process in “High Expectation” Churches

In this section I review pertinent literature and church systems that show correlations between the membership process and the overall health of the church. The health of a church can be measured in many ways, but in this instance, it is measured upon the criteria of developing fully functioning members who are highly committed disciples.

From the review of literature, one type of church, the “high expectation” church, clearly stands out. The high expectation church is one that places a high level of expectation upon its members and has specific requirements necessary for membership. During the late 90s, Rainer led a research project that gathered data from 287

“evangelistic” Southern Baptist churches with high member retention rates in thirty-three states and in varied socioeconomic contexts. In his book High Expectations, Rainer reports findings that attempt to answer questions about “closing the back door” or member retention. The overwhelming conclusion to the research was that the best way to retain church members is to expect more of them. Findings revealed that 72.7 percent of these churches “required or expected” members to attend a new member class (104).

Topics included in the new members classes are as follows:

1. Doctrine of the church (67.0 %)
2. Polity/government of church (66.0%)
3. Examination of church constitution (64.6%)
4. Purpose of Lord’s Supper/Communion and Baptism (63.5%)
5. Examination of church covenant/church discipline (63.2%)
6. Policies for church discipline/exclusion of members (62.5%)
7. Expectation of members after joining (58.7%)
8. History of church (56.5%)
9. Tour of church facilities (56.4%)
10. Denominational information (51.6%)
11. Plan of Salvation (49.1%)
12. Tithing/Financial support of the church (47.4%)
13. Method/Meaning of Baptism (41.1%)
14. Requirements for membership (38.9%)
15. Current opportunities for service in the church (37.2%)
16. Training in spiritual disciplines (35.2%)
17. Introduction to church staff and leadership (33.7%)
18. Explanation of churches mission and/or vision (32.6%)
19. Inventory of spiritual gifts (29.5%)
20. Structure/support of missions (21.4%)
21. Training for witnessing/evangelism (18.6%). (110)

Of note in the list of topics is the fact that a discussion member expectations ranks as only the seventh priority in the new member classes Ranier researched.

Further research indicates that a distinct difference is evident among churches that simply offered a new member class, churches that expected new members to attend such a class, and churches that required attendance. In churches that offered a membership

class but “neither required nor expected” attendance, the member retention rate was only 72 percent. To clarify, only 72 percent of the new members remained somewhat active two years following membership. In churches that “expected but did not require” a membership class, the member retention rate was more substantial at 89 percent over a two-year period. The most important finding from the study relates to churches that “required” every new member to complete a membership class. The average member retention rate in these churches was 112 percent. This rate means that worship attendance was outpacing the rate of membership growth. To clarify, if one hundred new members joined X-church in a given year with a 112 percent member retention rate, then the worship attendance at that church would grow by an average of 112 people each Sunday (Rainer, High Expectations 104-06). Rainer points out that high expectation churches represent one of the most hopeful trends in American evangelism. When pointing to the evidence that verifies the effectiveness of high expectation churches, Rainer writes, “The trend is clear. The evidence is staggering. And the results are rewarding” (63).

Prophetically, Dean Kelly discusses a similar phenomenon in a sociological study from the early 1970s published in his book Why Conservative Churches are Growing. During the 1960s he observed the decline of the United Methodist Church in particular and mainline denominations in general. Mainline denominations in America, including Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, the American Baptist Convention, and the United Church of Christ began to decline in the early to mid-1960s (Kelly 1-16). Dean Kelly also notes that several denominations did not begin declining during the 1960s. The denominations that did not decline included the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, the Churches of God, the Pentecostal and

Holiness groups, and the Evangelicals (17-35). Kelly summarizes the difference between the declining denominations and growing denominations as “weak groups” and “strong groups.” The “strong” growing denominations had several characteristics in common called “traits of strictness” that were contradictory to the “weak” declining denomination who exhibited “traits of leniency.” Kelly organized the traits around shared goals, controls, and communication norms. The “traits of strictness” are, in order, “absolutism,” “conformity,” and “fanaticism” while the “traits of leniency” are “relativism,” “diversity,” and “dialogue” (84). The traits of strictness produced “evidences of social strength” and growing attendance while the traits of leniency produced “evidences of social weakness” and declining attendance. Figure 2.1 shows Kelly’s assertions.

Social Dimensions		GOALS	CONTROLS	COMMUNICATIONS
“STRONG” Groups	Traits of Strictness	Absolutism	Conformity	Fanaticism
	Evidences of Social Strength	Commitment	Discipline	Missionary Zeal
“WEAK” Groups	Traits of Leniency	Relativism	Diversity	Dialogue
	Evidences of Social Weakness	Lukewarmness	Individualism	Missionary Reserve

Figure 2.1 Summary of Kelly’s Findings

Kelly's findings show that growing churches exhibit commitment, discipline, and missionary zeal while declining churches exhibit lukewarmness, individualism, and missionary reserve. The commitment and discipline that Kelly discovered in the growing churches appeared to have been gained through different forms of absolutism regarding goals, vision, and leadership and conformity regarding involvement, expectations, and membership. Kelly's research in the early 1970s coincides well with Rainer's "high expectation" research in the late 1990s in that some type of requirement for entry into membership and maintenance of membership appears to be necessary for a local church to thrive.

One modern "high expectation" church is Ginghamburg United Methodist Church in Tipp City, Ohio. Both the quantitative and qualitative growth at Ginghamburg have been widely recognized. Pastor Michael Slaughter points to "The Covenant Principal" as one reason the church has grown so dramatically. The Covenant Principal places a high level of expectation upon each member at Ginghamburg UMC.. Michael Slaughter and Herb Miller comment about the meaning of membership:

As members of the Body of Christ, we are the only hands, feet, mouthpiece, and bank account that Jesus has on this earth. Membership is that place in one's spiritual pilgrimage where we say "I do" to this responsibility. The sacrament of baptism is not enough to define the role of membership. We cannot carry someone to commitment. Each person must give his or her own response to the command, "Follow Me." (80)

Slaughter clearly places a high priority on the role of membership at Ginghamburg. To ensure that each new member is effectively participating in the body of Christ, Ginghamburg's members are required to take a three-month course called Vital Christianity before joining. During this course participants learn about "Life in Christ,

Life in the Spirit, and Life in Community” (Slaughter and Miller, Appendix A). At the end of the course, a membership celebration recognizes those choosing to become members (68).

Other well-known teaching churches with similar approaches to membership are Saddleback Valley Community Church, Willow Creek Community Church, Mecklinberg Church, and North Point Community Church. In particular, Saddleback requires a four-hour course called Saddleback 101 or Discovering Church Membership. This course covers four areas listed as follows:

Our Salvation (What God has done for us)

Our Statement (Why we exist as a church)

Our Strategy (How we fulfill our purpose)

Our Structure (When & where we fulfill our purpose)

(Warren, Saddleback 101 4-22)

At the conclusion of the course, each participant is required to fill out a member application that asks for positive responses to the following questions:

1. Have you committed your life to Jesus Christ and trust Him for your salvation?
2. Have you been (or will you be upon membership) baptized by immersion (under water) after [original emphasis] you committed your life to Christ?
3. Have you completed Discovering Church Membership #101?
4. Do you desire to abide by the Saddleback Membership Covenant? (25)

This system for receiving new members has been part of the success and growth at Saddleback and has been replicated in hundreds of churches around the United States and abroad.

North Point Community Church is a thriving church planted in the early 1990's in Atlanta, Georgia. It also has a distinctive approach to membership that would qualify it as a high expectation church. Several requirements are placed upon a candidate for membership at North Point. The new member must be an active participant in a small group and a serve team before joining. The new member must also complete an online overview of ministry that takes about thirty minutes to complete. The overview discusses the mission, vision, and strategy of North Point. Lastly, the new member must answer several questions about specific beliefs and must be baptized by immersion before joining North Point. Attendance at North Point exceeds its membership by almost three hundred percent (North Point Community Church).

The approaches to membership at Ginghamburg, Saddleback, and North Point coupled with the research of Kelly and Rainer are all reminiscent of the system Wesley established when the early Methodist movement began growing exponentially. Wesley developed a system for discipleship that focused on the maturity of the young believer after conversion. As hoards of people came to new faith, Wesley was concerned that they would actually grow in faith beyond conversion, so over time he developed a system of groups with three parts—society, band, and class. The society meeting was the larger of the groups and was the first group new converts joined. As the development of the early Wesleyan system of groups evolved, participation in a band or class was required to attend a society meeting. Tickets for admission to society meetings were given out quarterly to those who had maintained attendance in a band or class (Snyder, Radical Wesley 57). The early system Wesley developed created numerical growth in the

Methodist movement that lasted for many decades. In part, Wesley's system was based on certain requirements for admission and continued involvement.

Conclusions of the Review

The review of literature outlines the biblical, theological, historical, and literary precedents set forth regarding fully functioning membership in the local church and highly committed disciples nurturing the reign of God's kingdom. In this review I find evidence to believe that the membership process in today's local churches is important to the overall health of the church. The biblical record, ancient literature, and the history of the Methodist movement are all replete with different approaches for an organized and intentional entry system into the body of Christ. Modern research and existing successful churches also point to a need for greater member training and accountability in the United Methodist Church, in particular, and in mainline "low-expectation" churches in general.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Problem

The problem relates to the tradition of expecting very little from members and the coincidental decline in national membership rolls in the United Methodist Church. My passion for finding a solution to the problem was birthed through personal experience regarding the commitment and involvement of members in the United Methodist churches I previously served.

Over the last five decades, the United Methodist Church has lost millions of members (Babbitt 307; Wilke 16). Although the mission of the UMC is to make disciples, the church does not even maintain the allegiance of its members on a weekly basis. I witnessed the national scene being played out in my local context for ministry as well. During my first five years of ordained ministry with the UMC, I helped more than four hundred people join a local church as new members. Sadly, I watched the majority of these new members slip away from active church life within a few months.

Along with the statistical data and personal experience I have also perceived that the membership commitment at the average United Methodist Church lacks purpose and zeal. Members are asked to support the church with the fourfold commitment of prayers, presence, gifts, and service, but little is expected of them beyond a positive response to the membership questions and subsequent attendance at church events.

These formative ministry experiences coupled with recent research awakened a desire within me to overcome this phenomenon that I had seen repeat itself during my first eight years of full-time pastoral leadership. I began to ask questions about the

membership requirements and processes in local United Methodist churches. I intuitively asked questions about what was missing in the membership process. I also wondered where those churches are that produce large numbers of fully functioning members and committed disciples instead of just large numbers.

In an attempt to answer these questions, I created a six-week course required for membership. The course is called Orchard 101 and covers a broad range of topics that help new members make the transition from passive involvement to active involvement. This course against the backdrop of a denominational culture of low expectations membership is the focus of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the research project was to study the Orchard 101 membership course at the Orchard United Methodist Church to determine if participants report change in the degree to which they are fully functioning members and highly committed disciples as compared to those who do not participate in Orchard 101.

The Research Project

The focus of the study was to assess the reported degree of change in participants of the Orchard 101 membership course based on seventeen factors that define fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship.

This study included a control group that was evaluated using the identical instrument used with the intervention group over the same period of time. The goal of this project was to gain participation of at least twenty-five people in the control group and twenty-five people in the intervention group. The project was a pre-post-post longitudinal study in the experimental mode as diagramed in Figure 3.1. The Ts represent

pretesting, immediate posttesting, and three-month posttesting based on the timetable for the Orchard 101 course. Pretesting coincided with the first session of Orchard 101. Immediate posttesting coincided with the last session of Orchard 101. Three-month posttesting took place approximately three months after the last session of Orchard 101. The Xs represent the Orchard 101 membership course, which is the intervention.

Intervention Group:	$T_{1(\text{pre})} \text{ --- } X_1(101) \text{ --- } T_2(\text{immediate}) \text{ --- } T_3(\text{three months})$
Control Group:	$T_{1(\text{pre})} \text{ --- (no 101) --- } T_2(\text{immediate}) \text{ --- } T_3(\text{three months})$

Figure 3.1. Longitudinal Testing Design with Control Group.

Variables

The independent variable for this project was the six-week Orchard 101 membership course (see Appendix B). The course instructor and the content of the course remained the same for the length of the study. The course consisted of six sessions:

- Week One—Beginning the Journey of Following Jesus,
- Week Two—Small Groups and Methodism,
- Week Three—Spiritual Gifts,
- Week Four—Evangelism and Tithing,
- Week Five—Mission and Core Ministry Values, and
- Week Six—Member Expectations.

One of the highlights of the Orchard 101 course is that it attempted to give participants a taste of small groups along the way. The participants were divided into

smaller groups for reflection, discussion, and prayer during every session. Participants were asked intentionally to seek out new people to be in their break-out groups for the first three sessions but are encouraged to keep the same break-out groups intact for the last three sessions.

Participants in the course were required to attend at least four of the six sessions, with make-up classes provided for participants who have to miss any particular week. These makeup sessions were abbreviated to focus only on the content so they could not replicate the group interaction of the regular sessions.

The dependent variables in this study are the reported degrees of change as evaluated from those receiving Orchard 101 and those not receiving Orchard 101 in terms of the characteristics of a fully functioning member and a highly committed disciple. These two dependent variables are defined by the seventeen factors discussed in detail below. Eight factors define a fully functioning member at the Orchard Church, and nine factors define a highly committed disciple. The dependent variables were measured as the self-reported degree of change in the participant using a researcher-designed, Likert-scale questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Factors of the Study

The first outcome of the study, fully functioning members, was measured by eight factors that define membership. These factors describe how a member at the Orchard Church is expected to be involved as a covenantal partner with other members. As highlighted in Chapter 2, each of these factors relate well with the theological images of membership in the kingdom of God. These factors also flow directly from the five purposes of the Orchard Church.

The second outcome of the study, highly committed disciples, was measured by nine factors that define healthy characteristics for a highly committed disciple of Jesus. As highlighted in Chapter 2, each of these factors is rooted in biblical images of discipleship. Although they are not exhaustive, they represent a well-rounded practice of discipleship.

Factors Relating to Fully Functioning Membership

At the Orchard Church, the membership requirement is presented through five purposes. They are reaching up, branching out, bearing fruit, standing firm, and growing deep. The factors for fully functioning membership flow directly from these purposes. All of these purposes resonate with the image of a tree growing in an orchard.

Factor #1—worship (FFM1). The purpose of reaching up is worship. The image is one of reaching toward God (or the Son) with our whole being to honor him and receive his best in return. The practical outcome for fully functioning member involvement is to attend Sunday worship regularly, only missing when out of town or sick. “Worship” relates to questions ten, twenty-seven, and forty-four in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions two, three, and six of Orchard 101.

Factor #2—fellowship (FFM2). The purpose of branching out is fellowship. The image is one of branching or reaching out to others to include them in relationships. “Authentic community” is a buzzword at the Orchard. Fellowship is more than getting together for a social occasion. It is sharing life together; the hurts, joys, frustrations, failures, and successes. The practical outcome for fully functioning member involvement is participating in ministry environments where relationships can be developed beyond the small talk of Sunday morning. This sharing happens most effectively in small groups

but also happens on planning teams for special events, at retreats, and at special events. “Fellowship” relates to questions eleven, twenty-eight, and forty-five in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions three and six of Orchard 101.

Factors #3 and #4—evangelism (FFM3) and service (FFM4). The purpose of bearing fruit is evangelism and service. The image is one of a tree bearing the fruit appropriate to its DNA. Just as an orange tree bears the fruit of oranges and an apple tree is designed to bear apples, individual people are designed to bear certain types of fruit depending on how they are gifted for ministry. The practical outcome for fully functioning membership is involvement on a serve team or reach team at the Orchard and participation in special events that relate to service or evangelism. Currently the Orchard has twenty-one serve teams and three reach teams that are available for participation. Special serve and reach opportunities also arise periodically throughout the year. The factor of “evangelism” relates to questions twelve, twenty-nine, and forty-six in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions two, three, four, and five of Orchard 101. The factor of “service” relates to questions thirteen, thirty, and forty-seven in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions two, three, four, and six of Orchard 101.

Factors # 5, #6, and #7—prayer (FFM5), stewardship (FFM6), and care (FFM7). The purpose of standing firm is prayer, stewardship, and care. The image is one of the trunk of a tree. The trunk holds everything together and is the tree’s foundation for reaching up, branching out, bearing fruit, and growing deep. The practical outcomes for fully functioning membership are prayer, stewardship, and care. Prayer happens on the Prayer Reach Team and in the daily lives of members. Members are asked to pray for

others and the mission of the Orchard regularly. Stewardship happens when people give their best resources to God understanding that he created them. Stewardship also happens specifically through offerings and growth toward and beyond the tithe. Care happens in many contexts, but we teach that it happens best in small groups where authentic relationships are formed. The impetus for care ministries is placed on the members of the Orchard, recognizing that the best care is given in the context of community and not by a paid staff member. “Prayer” relates to questions fourteen, thirty-one, and forty-eight in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions two and three of Orchard 101. “Stewardship” relates to questions fifteen, thirty-two, and forty-nine in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions three and five of Orchard 101. “Care” relates to questions sixteen, thirty-three, and fifty in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions two and six of Orchard 101.

Factor #8—spiritual growth (FFM8). The purpose of growing deep is spiritual growth. The image is one of the roots of a tree growing deep and strong in the soil in which it is planted. In the same way, the spiritual roots of the fully functioning member should grow deep in the understanding of God’s nature and the application of his Word. This growth happens through study and application of God’s Word, sharing and discussing with other members at the Orchard, being open to accountability, and stepping out of their comfort zones to follow Jesus wherever he may lead. As noted in Ephesians 3, all of these activities should be rooted in a full understanding of God’s love and grace if they are to give life to the member:

⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and

long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19)

The practical outcome for fully functioning membership is involvement with a Grow Group or a Love Group and the development of personal spiritual disciplines that help with spiritual growth. At the time of this study no Love small groups existed within the Orchard. “Spiritual Growth” relates to questions seventeen, thirty-four, and fifty-one in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions one, two, three, and six of Orchard 101.

Factors Relating to Highly Committed Discipleship

Nine factors relate to highly committed discipleship. Each factor is discussed briefly in Orchard 101 and can be measured based on the self-perceptions of the member. As highlighted in Chapter 2, these factors are rooted in a biblical description of the characteristics of healthy discipleship that is not exhaustive but well-rounded for the purposes of evaluation.

Factor #9—being assured of salvation (HCD1). Highly committed discipleship begins with a sure experience of repentance that requires trust in Jesus. A disciple is one who is marked by this beginning act of trust and belief that initiates the journey of following Jesus. Disciples must be confident that they are “born again” like Nicodemus in John 3. A disciple must also experience assurance as a mark of the new birth given by the testimony of the Holy Spirit as in Romans 8:16-17. “Being Assured of Salvation” relates to questions one, eighteen, and thirty-five in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in session one of Orchard 101.

Factor #10—placing discipleship as the number one priority in life (HCD2).

A highly committed disciple has no commitment priority or allegiance that supersedes

loyalty to Jesus. In Matthew 16 he unashamedly calls his followers to let go of their lives so they can find the true lives he wants to give them. “Placing Discipleship as the Number One Priority in Life” relates to questions two, nineteen, and thirty-six in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in session one of Orchard 101.

Factor #11—obeying God’s laws and commands (HCD3). Highly committed disciples of Jesus more than simply profess allegiance to Jesus; they prove allegiance through actions that are consistent with the teachings of Jesus. This allegiance requires obedience to God’s laws and commands as they are found in Holy Scripture. Obedience, no being the same as works righteousness, serves as a means of God grace that brings about Christian perfection as love of God and neighbor is carried out in daily life through the perfect intent to love on the part of the disciple. “Obeying God’s Laws and Commands” relates to questions three, twenty, and thirty-seven in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions one, two, three, and four of Orchard 101.

Factor #12—representing God in the world (HCD4). A highly committed disciple lives as an extension of the ministry of Christ in this present age and thus represents God in the midst of every lifestyle situation and personal contact. “Representing God in the World” relates to questions four, twenty-one, and thirty-eight in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions one and five of Orchard 101.

Factor #13—serving and caring for others (HCD5). Highly committed disciples serve and care for others in a manner that is not self-centered. The disciple shares with others through words and deeds that lead others to experience God’s presence. The service and care are rendered for God’s glory and purposes. “Serving and

Caring for Others” relates to questions five, twenty-two, and thirty-nine in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions three and six of Orchard 101.

Factor #14—being trained by God’s word (HCD6). Highly committed disciples are nurtured and trained by God’s word over time. Disciples do not have an arrival point in this lifetime. God is never finished with the faithful disciple. Disciples must be open to applying principals from God’s word to every situation they encounter throughout their lives. The disciple must understand the Bible as a launching pad for ministry and not just a source for academic debate or doctrinal acquisition. “Being Trained by God’s Word” relates to questions six, twenty-three, and forty in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions one, two, and six of Orchard 101.

Factor #15—maintaining intimacy with God (HCD7). A highly committed disciple of Jesus maintains an active relationship with God. Intimacy is maintained through the regular practice of spiritual disciplines. Three of the most common disciplines are worship, prayer, and Bible study. “Maintaining Intimacy with God” relates to questions seven, twenty-four, and forty-one in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions one, two, and three of Orchard 101.

Factor #16—making new disciples (HCD8). Highly committed disciples are intentional, creative, and passionate about making new disciples. Committed disciples will be instrumental in growing God’s kingdom because they will produce radical life change in others. “Making New Disciples” relates to questions eight, twenty-five, and forty-two in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions one, two, and five of Orchard 101.

Factor #17—stewarding God’s resources (HCD9). Highly committed disciples come to a point in their journey where they realize that God is not only the creator of the universe and the giver of abundant life but that he literally owns everything. Disciples recognize themselves as stewards of property that ultimately belongs to someone else God. This awareness creates a generous spirit in disciples that allows them to share their financial, material, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual resources for God’s purposes and for the benefit of others. “Stewarding God’s Resources” relates to questions nine, twenty-six, and forty-three in the Spirituality Assessment and is discussed in sessions three and five of Orchard 101.

Research Questions

The use of four different research questions helped maintain the focus of the study, which is to determine the effect of the Orchard 101 membership course in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship. The first question asks about the degree of self-reported change found in the group receiving the Orchard 101 intervention. The second question asks about the degree of self-reported change found in the group that did not receive the Orchard 101 intervention, or the control group. The third question asks about the differences, if any are present, between the two groups.

Research Question #1

What degree of change is reported in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in those Orchard Church attenders who have completed the Orchard 101 membership course?

Research Question #2

What degree of change is reported in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in those Orchard Church attenders who have not completed the Orchard 101 membership course?

Research Question #3

What are the differences in the degree of change in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship between the group who completed Orchard 101 and the group who did not complete Orchard 101?

Research Question #4

What demographic differences in the two audiences might also account for any observed differences in their self-reported answers?

Population and Sample

The population of the study was the attenders at the Orchard Church. This total number was somewhere between three hundred and four hundred people, but exact records are not kept. Of this population, 120 people were already members at the time of testing and were excluded from the study. Another half-dozen people had taken the Orchard 101 course but have chosen not to join the Orchard for various reasons. These people were also excluded from the study.

Two different panels of subjects were used in the study. The first was the self-selected panel group that took the Orchard 101 membership course. Attenders at the Orchard were invited to participate in the Orchard 101 course through bulletin announcements (see Appendix D), a personal letter (see Appendix E), and worship announcements. Attenders are not recruited for the course but are instead only invited to

attend. This randomly gathered panel group became the intervention group because they enrolled in Orchard 101. The second panel group did not take Orchard 101 but still answered the questions on the Spirituality Assessment in a pre-post-post fashion right alongside the group that took Orchard 101. This group was randomly gathered via a letter of invitation (see Appendix F) and subsequent personal invitations. The second panel group was made up of regular attenders at the Orchard defined by the following criteria: Control group subjects were persons who were 13 years or older, had attended Sunday worship at the Orchard more than once, and had been involved in at least one Orchard activity or ministry other than Sunday worship.

Instrumentation

The study utilized a researcher-designed, Likert-scale questionnaire called the Spirituality Assessment (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was administered anonymously with respondents being identified based on the last four digits of their social security number. The questionnaire begins with general demographic data then asks the participant to answer fifty-one questions based on a seven-point Likert scale with one being “Never” and seven being “Always.” The questions are arranged around the two dependent variables of the study (fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship) and the seventeen factors that define them. Three questions were asked for each factor. Twenty-four questions were asked regarding fully functioning membership, and twenty-seven questions were asked regarding highly committed discipleship. The questions are distributed as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Question Distribution by Areas of Study and Defining Factors

Area of Study	Fully Functioning Membership									Highly Committed Discipleship								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Factors	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Questions	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	

The development of this questionnaire began with the review of literature and the identification of the different factors to be studied. A subsequent review of the resource book, Measures of Religiosity, showed that a Likert-scale questionnaire would be a good way to collect data regarding self-reported religious involvement (Hill and Hood 171). The instrument is derived from the “Faith Maturity Scale” as the foundational source. This scale “is designed to measure the degree to which a person embodies the priorities, commitments, and perspectives characteristic of vibrant and life transforming faith, as those have been understood in mainline protestant traditions” (171). This instrument served as the beginning point for a researcher-designed questionnaire that is based on the seventeen factors. Duplicating the “Faith Maturity Scale,” a seven-point Likert scale instead of a five-point scale was chosen with the hope of showing a broader degree of change in participants. No questions were quoted or paraphrased from the “Faith Maturity Scale,” but it did help show that a Likert-scale questionnaire could be used to measure change in regards to the matter of faith, namely membership and discipleship. The first draft of the questionnaire included the responses in Figure 3.2.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(never)	(rarely)	(once in awhile)	(sometimes)	(often)	(almost always)	(always)

Figure 3.2. First draft of Likert-scale terminology and presentation.

After a pretest was given to the Dissertation Reflection Team (DRT), the terminology proved to have a paralyzing effect upon the respondent. One member remarked, “Is there really a difference between “rarely” and “once in awhile?” The other members of the DRT agreed that the terminology was too cumbersome. My dissertation mentor, Dr. Stuart Palmer, suggested that the questionnaire simply use three words to place value on the scale with “never” at one end, “sometimes” in the middle, and “always” at the other end. The instrument would still use a seven-point scale but without specific references to each number. This line of thinking was carried one step further when a member of my DRT revealed that the consulting firm that employs her uses a trend in questioning that simply lists end points but leaves the respondent to place value on the midpoints of the scale. With agreement from the mentor of this project, we established a seven-point respondent scale as shown in Figure 3.3. Each circle moving from never toward always is designated 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 for the purposes of statistical analysis. Reverse questions were also used in the questionnaire with the circle closest to “never” equaling 7 and the circle closest to “always” equaling 1.

NEVER ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ALWAYS

Figure 3.3. Final Draft of Likert-scale Terminology and Presentation.

A final pretest to check the wording of each question was completed by seven members of New Hope Wesleyan Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, at my request. The senior pastor of New Hope, Dr. Benji Kelley, helped obtain these responses during a weekend in which I visited to preach. These responses proved to be valuable in helping refine the questions so that they could be easily understood and answered by the average church attendee.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

In his book, William Wiersma defines validity in the following manner: “Internal validity is the extent to which results can be interpreted accurately, and external validity is the extent to which results can be generalized to populations, situations, and conditions” (4). Reliability is defined as referring “to the consistency of the research and the extent to which studies can be replicated” (8). Reliability and validity are properly directed toward future uses of the instrument. This instrument is untested so reliability and validity cannot be discussed except for face validity achieved through various means of pretesting.

Attempts to control reliability were accomplished by the following steps. First, the fact that the responses are based on the anonymous self-perceptions of the respondents saved the answers from being artificially manipulated because of the biases of any particular researcher or the felt need to respond a certain way by the respondents. Second, the respondent answers can be easily translated into numerical data that were interpreted anonymously and with statistical mathematics.

Threats to the internal and external validity of the instrument were controlled through various means. First, the panel groups were self-selected into the study. Second, the design of the instrument was straightforward and was administered in identical formats. Third, answers were determined by the anonymous self-perceptions of the respondents.

The biggest threat to the validity of the instrument design does not come from the nature of the design of the instrument but from the design of the research project itself. The repeated use of an identical questionnaire may produce a felt need in the respondents to change their answers along the way in order to show some degree of change. Three measures are being taken to control or weaken this particular threat to possible validity. The first measure is that the questionnaire is simply titled Spirituality Assessment. The first draft of the questionnaire was titled Growth Survey. This former title implicitly dictated a certain response from the respondents upon subsequent responses to the questionnaire. The second measure is that the instructions on the questionnaire ask the respondent to answer questions honestly and without value as to what they think they should be in light of perception about what a good follower of Jesus looks like. The third measure that weakens this threat to validity is the fact that the questionnaire was taken anonymously.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures for the project are best understood through two different lenses. One lens is the control group, and the other lens is the intervention group. I begin with the intervention group.

Data collection began with the intervention group at the first Orchard 101 session. The Spirituality Assessment was administered at the first session as people entered the room. High responses were anticipated in such a closed environment. A few people did not join the Orchard 101 course until the second week. The assessment was administered to these people immediately following the second session. Participants in Orchard 101 are required to make up all sessions they did not attend with a maximum of two missed sessions being allowed.

The Spirituality Assessment was administered a second time following the final session of Orchard 101. The second assessment was sent home with participants and included a stamped, return envelope. Any participants not in attendance for the final session had an opportunity to respond to the assessment during their make-up session, which happened within one week of the regular session.

The Spirituality Assessment was then administered via mail approximately three months following the last session of Orchard 101. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included with the mailing, and the cover letter invited participants simply to return the assessment to a designated location at church the following Sunday. For all nonrespondents, a second letter was mailed ten days following the first. If a third mailing was needed, it was mailed ten days following the second. A fourth contact was not attempted.

The control group was introduced to the research project with a letter of invitation to participate that was mailed approximately one week before Orchard 101 was to begin and one week before the Spirituality Assessment arrived in the mail. Personal phone calls were also utilized to illicit responses from the control group subjects, but the design of

the study was never revealed. The control group received the Spirituality Assessment in the mail coinciding with session one of the Orchard 101 membership course, immediately following the last session of Orchard 101, then again three months following the final Orchard 101 course meeting. Follow-up letters were sent to nonrespondents at ten and twenty day intervals. A fourth follow-up was not attempted.

The paper responses of participants have been saved and filed based on the control and intervention group categories and according to the particular anonymous codes.

Data Analysis

The primary means for effective data analysis was assistance from Dr. Dick Thompson. Dick is President and CEO of High Performing Systems, Inc. Dick's company is a leadership and teamwork consulting and training firm located in Watkinsville, Georgia. Quantitative data derived from the questionnaires was analyzed using a method implemented by Dr. Dick Thompson. A multivariate analysis test (MANOVA) with repeated measures was used to determine the self-reported degree of change in the intervention group and control group subjects for all seventeen factors. The data was used to interpret the differences between the control group and the intervention group in terms of degree of change from one testing period to the next. The responses of the participants from the pre-, post-, and second post-questionnaires were compared to accomplish this analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study shows that a positive relationship exists between the Orchard 101 Membership Course and the development of fully functioning members and highly committed disciples in The Orchard Church. The findings are presented beginning with a profile of the subjects. Data on reliability of the instrument used in this study is presented next. Finally, results of the research questions are given.

Profile of the Subjects

Forty-one members of the population responded to the invitation to take the Orchard 101 Course, creating an intervention group that was self-selected. Subsequently, one hundred twenty-seven subjects who did not sign-up to attend the intervention course were invited to be part of the control group. The two groups did not overlap. Thirty people who did not receive the intervention (see Appendix B) responded to all three spirituality assessments (see Appendix A), making the control group panel equal 23.62 percent of the control group subjects and 16.67 percent of the population. Twenty-eight people who completed all sessions of the intervention responded to all three spirituality assessments, making the intervention panel group equal to 68.29 percent of the intervention group subjects and 15.56 percent of the population. Only those subjects who responded to all three spirituality assessments have been evaluated for this study. All subjects and panel group members were self-selected within the Orchard Church Attender population criteria. The expectation was that the response rate for the control group population would be much lower than the response rate for the intervention group

because of a greater level of weekly involvement with the intervention group. Table 4.1 depicts population, sample, and panel group sizes.

Table 4.1. Population, Sample, and Panel

	Population	Sample (N)	Panel (n)	Panel Population (%)	Panel Sample (%)
Control Group	180	127	30	16.67%	23.62%
Intervention Group	180	41	28	15.56%	68.29%

Profile information was also gained from six demographic questions. The results of the demographic data are reported in the discussion of research question number four.

Instrument Reliability

Each scale item in the study was tested for reliability. Summary statistics pertaining to the items remained constant over the three tests at the .9 level or higher. Table 4.3 demonstrates internal consistency of the instrument as measured by Cronbach's alpha. Alpha is acceptable at $\alpha \geq .7$. No other study has utilized the researcher-designed questionnaire.

Table 4.2. Internal Consistency Reliability

Questionnaire Administration	α
Pretest	.91
Posttest ¹	.93
Posttest ²	.92

The researcher-designed questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part I asked for basic demographic information and information regarding previous faith and church involvement. Part II consisted of fifty-one questions measured on a seven-point Likert scale from 1, “never,” to 7, “always” (see Appendix A). The questionnaire sought to measure the degree of self-reported change based on seventeen factors that relate to fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship. Three questions pertain to each factor. A multivariate analysis test (MANOVA) with repeated measures was used to determine the self-reported degree of change in the intervention group and control group subjects for all seventeen factors. A summary of the analysis of variance tests is reported in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Degree of Change from Pretest to Second Posttest

Factors	Intervention Group			Control Group		
	n=28			n=30		
	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$
FFM 1 (worship)	5.86	6.02	0.17	5.31	5.49	0.18
FFM 2 (fellowship)	4.11	4.89	0.79*	3.71	3.88	0.17
FFM 3 (evangelism)	3.55	4.46	0.92*	2.94	3.28	0.33
FFM 4 (service)	4.89	6.02	1.13*	4.29	4.70	0.41*
FFM 5 (prayer)	4.74	5.65	0.92*	4.51	4.87	0.36*
FFM 6 (stewardship)	4.99	5.43	0.44	4.36	4.57	0.21
FFM 7 (care)	4.11	4.81	0.70*	3.94	4.18	0.23
FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	4.87	5.76	0.89*	4.00	4.43	0.43*
HCD 1 (assured of salvation)	6.18	6.52	0.35*	6.06	6.23	0.18
HCD 2 (disc. as first priority)	5.06	5.60	0.54*	5.01	5.24	0.23
HCD 3 (obey God)	4.32	5.10	0.77*	4.39	4.66	0.27
HCD 4 (represent God)	4.82	5.38	0.56*	4.90	5.06	0.16
HCD 5 (serving/caring)	5.40	5.82	0.42*	5.42	5.40	-0.02
HCD 6 (trained by bible)	4.69	5.26	0.57*	4.59	4.78	0.19
HCD 7 (intimacy w/ God)	5.15	5.77	0.62*	4.76	5.11	0.36*
HCD 8 (making new disciples)	3.77	4.38	0.61*	3.79	3.90	0.11
HCD 9 (stewarding resources)	4.35	5.24	0.89*	4.30	4.18	-0.12

FFM = Fully Functioning Member and HCD = Highly Committed Disciple

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ level

Change in Orchard 101 Intervention Group

The first research question of this study was, “What degree of change is reported in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in those Orchard Church attenders who have completed the Orchard 101 membership course?” I discuss the results for the intervention group organized by the two areas for study—fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship.

The results from the area of fully functioning membership as seen in the analysis of variance (ANOVA) mean and change results reporting degree of change in the subjects over time are reported in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Intervention Group Change in Terms of Fully Functioning Membership

101 Group (n=28)	T ₁ Mean	T ₂ Mean	$\Delta(t_2-t_1)$	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_2)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$
FFM 1 (worship)	5.86	5.90	0.05	6.02	0.12	0.17
FFM 2 (fellowship)	4.11	4.62	0.51*	4.89	0.27	0.79*
FFM 3 (evangelism)	3.55	4.36	0.81*	4.46	0.11	0.92*
FFM 4 (service)	4.89	5.73	0.83*	6.02	0.30	1.13*
FFM 5 (prayer)	4.74	5.30	0.56*	5.65	0.36	0.92*
FFM 6 (stewardship)	4.99	5.37	0.38	5.43	0.06	0.44
FFM 7 (care)	4.11	4.67	0.56*	4.81	0.14	0.70*
FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	4.87	5.37	0.50*	5.76	0.39*	0.89*

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ or less level

The intervention group showed significant positive change in six of the eight factors regarding fully functioning membership. The spirituality assessments revealed that the greatest degree of change occurred in the factor of service (FFM4 = 1.13), with most of the change occurring between the pretest and first posttest (FFM4 = 0.83). Two other factors also report a degree of change greater than 0.90. These are evangelism (FFM3 = 0.92) and prayer (FFM5 = 0.92). Other areas where significant change was reported pertain to the factors of fellowship (FFM2 = 0.79), care (FFM7 = 0.70), and spiritual growth (FFM8 = 0.89). The two factors that did not show statistically significant change are worship (FFM1 = 0.17) and stewardship (FFM6 = 0.44) with worship

showing the least amount of change. It should also be noted that the bulk of self-reported change regarding fully functioning membership happened during Orchard 101.

Regarding the second area, highly committed discipleship, the intervention group showed a significant degree of change in seven of nine factors. Table 4.5 shows the MANOVA mean and change results for this area.

Table 4.5. Intervention Group Change in Terms of Highly Committed Discipleship

101 Group (n=28)	T ₁ Mean	T ₂ Mean	$\Delta(t_2-t_1)$	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_2)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$
HCD 1 (assured of salvation)	6.18	6.42	0.24	6.52	0.11	0.35*
HCD 2 (disc. as first priority)	5.06	5.48	0.42*	5.60	0.12	0.54*
HCD 3 (obey God)	4.32	4.90	0.58*	5.10	0.19	0.77*
HCD 4 (represent God)	4.82	5.04	0.21	5.38	0.35	0.56*
HCD 5 (serving/caring)	5.40	5.68	0.27	5.82	0.14	0.42*
HCD 6 (trained by bible)	4.69	5.07	0.38*	5.26	0.19	0.57*
HCD 7 (intimacy w/ God)	5.15	5.45	0.30	5.77	0.32	0.62*
HCD 8 (making new disciples)	3.77	4.55	0.77*	4.38	-0.17	0.61*
HCD 9 (stewarding resources)	4.35	4.99	0.64*	5.24	0.25	0.89*

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ or less level

The highest degree of change was reported in the factor stewarding God's resources (HCD9 = 0.89). The second highest change occurred in the factor obeying God's laws and commands (HCD3 = 0.77). Other factors with significant change are placing discipleship as a number one priority (HCD2 = 0.54), representing God in the world (HCD4 = 0.56), being trained by God's word (HCD6 = 0.57), maintaining intimacy with God (HCD7 = 0.62), and making new disciples (HCD8 = 0.61). The two factors pertaining to highly committed discipleship that showed the lowest significant

change were being assured of salvation (HCD1 = 0.35) and serving and caring for others (HCD5 = 0.42). Again, the bulk of the change was reported at posttest one. The exception was with the factor representing God in the world, which showed more change between posttest two and three than as a direct result of the intervention (HCD4: $t_2 - t_1 = 0.21$ and $t_3 - t_2 = 0.35$). All nine factors pertaining the highly committed discipleship showed significant change.

The intervention group showed significant change in fifteen of the seventeen factors (above). Results from the first posttest generally showed more change than the second posttest. The change reported in terms of fully functioning membership appeared to happen as a direct result of Orchard 101 with six of eight factors showing significant change at post-test one. On the other hand, the change in terms of highly committed discipleship was more consistent over time with only five of nine areas showing significant change immediately following the course.

Also of note, significant change occurred in the factor stewarding God's resources (HCD9) in terms of highly committed discipleship, but the factor of stewardship (FFM6) in terms of fully functioning membership did not show significant change. The distinctions between the two factors are discussed in Chapter 5.

Change in the Non-Orchard 101 Control Group

The second research question was, "What degree of change is reported in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in those Orchard Church attenders who have not completed the Orchard 101 membership course?" The results for the control group are presented in two areas-fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship. ANOVA mean and change results reporting degree of

change in the control group subjects in terms of fully functioning membership are reported in Table 4.6. Regarding the first area, fully functioning membership, the control group showed a significant degree of change in three of eight factors. The factors were service (FFM4 = 0.41), spiritual growth (FFM8 = 0.43), and prayer (FFM5 = 0.36).

Table 4.6. Control Group Change in Terms of Fully Functioning Membership

101 Group (n=28)	T ₁ Mean	T ₂ Mean	$\Delta(t_2-t_1)$	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_2)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$
FFM 1 (worship)	5.31	5.47	0.16	5.49	0.02	0.18
FFM 2 (fellowship)	3.71	3.63	-0.08	3.88	0.24	0.17
FFM 3 (evangelism)	2.94	3.00	0.06	3.28	0.28*	0.33
FFM 4 (service)	4.29	4.24	-0.04	4.70	0.46*	0.41*
FFM 5 (prayer)	4.51	4.79	0.28	4.87	0.08	0.36*
FFM 6 (stewardship)	4.36	4.44	0.09	4.57	0.12	0.21
FFM 7 (care)	3.94	4.10	0.16	4.18	0.08	0.23
FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	4.00	4.36	0.36*	4.43	0.08	0.43*

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ or less level

One factor with significant change was reported for the area of highly committed discipleship. ANOVA mean and change results reporting degree of change in the control group subjects in terms of highly committed discipleship are reported in Table 4.7

Table 4.7. Control Group Change in Terms of Highly Committed Discipleship

101 Group (n=28)	T1 Mean	T2Mean	$\Delta(t2-t1)$	T3Mean	$\Delta(t3-t2)$	$\Delta(t3-t1)$
HCD 1 (assured of salvation)	6.06	6.14	0.09	6.23	0.09	0.18
HCD 2 (disc. as first priority)	5.01	5.31	0.30*	5.24	-0.07	0.23
HCD 3 (obey God)	4.39	4.44	0.06	4.66	0.21	0.27
HCD 4 (represent God)	4.90	5.04	0.14	5.06	0.01	0.16
HCD 5 (serving/caring)	5.42	5.50	0.08	5.40	-0.10	-0.02
HCD 6 (trained by bible)	4.59	4.66	0.07	4.78	0.12	0.19
HCD 7 (intimacy w/ God)	4.76	4.98	0.22	5.11	0.13	0.36*
HCD 8 (make new disciples)	3.79	3.78	-0.01	3.90	0.12	0.11
HCD 9 (steward resources)	4.30	4.27	-0.03	4.18	-0.09	-0.12

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ or less level

The one factor with significant change that was reported for the control group was maintaining intimacy with God (HCD7 = 0.36). No significant change was reported with any other factor regarding highly committed discipleship. Nevertheless, the factor of placing discipleship as the number one priority (HCD2) showed significant change at posttest one (0.30), but did not show a cumulative significant change with a posttest two score of (-0.07) and a cumulative score of (0.23).

Comparison of Intervention and Control Groups

The third research question was, “What are the differences in the degree of change in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship between the group who completed Orchard 101 and the group who did not complete Orchard 101?” Several significant differences between the intervention group and control group exist. Regarding the seventeen factors being studied, the results of the findings show a higher overall degree of change in the intervention group, immediate change due

to the intervention, shared factors with little or no change in both groups, and shared factors with significant change in both groups. Table 4.8 summarizes several differences between the intervention group and the control group in simple yes and no terms. “Yes” implies a statistically significant degree of change while “no” does not.

Table 4.8. Reported Degrees of Change in Simple Terms

Factors	Orchard 101 Group n=28	Non-Orchard 101 Group n=30
	Significant Δ (yes or no)	Significant Δ (yes or no)
FFM 1 (worship)	No*	No*
FFM 2 (fellowship)	Yes	No
FFM 3 (evangelism)	Yes	No
FFM 4 (service)	Yes**	Yes**
FFM 5 (prayer)	Yes**	Yes**
FFM 6 (stewardship)	No*	No*
FFM 7 (care)	Yes	No
FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	Yes**	Yes**
HCD 1 (assured of salvation)	Yes	No
HCD 2 (disc. as first priority)	Yes	No
HCD 3 (obey God)	Yes	No
HCD 4 (represent God)	Yes	No
HCD 5 (serving/caring)	Yes	No
HCD 6 (trained by bible)	Yes	No
HCD 7 (intimacy w/ God)	Yes**	Yes**
HCD 8 (making new disciples)	Yes	No
HCD 9 (stewarding resources)	Yes	No

FFM = Fully Functioning Member

HCD = Highly Committed Disciple

* indicated shared no's between the intervention and control groups

** shared yes's between the intervention and control groups

The overall mean scores for the control and intervention groups show that the intervention group may have been more prepared to experience change than the control group. Although this study is focused upon differences in degree of change between the two groups, the intervention group started with higher mean scores in every factor relating to fully functioning membership than the control group at the pre-test. The two groups show more similar mean scores in the factors relating to highly committed discipleship (see table 4.3 p.99)

Higher Degree of Change in Intervention Group

The subjects who took Orchard 101 (the intervention) reported statistically significant change in fifteen of the seventeen factors while the subjects who did not take Orchard 101 reported significant change in four of the seventeen factors. The intervention group members reported change in six of eight factors relating to fully functioning membership and nine of nine factors relating to highly committed discipleship. Although every factor related to the intervention group did not show significant change, every factor related to the intervention reported a change score that was greater than the control group. The one exception was the factor of worship (FFM1).

On the other hand, the control group members only experienced change in three of eight factors relating to fully functioning membership and one of nine factors relating to highly committed discipleship. Table 4.9 summarizes the factors that reported significant change in each group. The number of factors that did not report change in each area showed a consistently low amount of change across all seventeen factors for the control group. No factors in the control group reported significant change without significant change also being reported in the intervention group.

Table 4.9. Intervention and Control Group Factors Reporting Significant Change

Intervention Group Δ Factors	Control Group Δ Factors
Fellowship (FFM2)	
Evangelism (FFM3)	
Service (FFM4)	Service (FFM4)
Prayer (FFM5)	Prayer (FFM5)
Care (FFM7)	
Spiritual growth (FFM8)	Spiritual growth (FFM8)
Assured of Salvation (HCD1)	
Disc. as first priority (HCD2)	
Obey God (HCD3)	
Represent God (HCD4)	
Serving/Caring (HCD5)	
Trained by bible (HCD6)	
Intimacy w/ God (HCD7)	Intimacy w/God (HCD7)
Making new disciples (HCD8)	
Stewarding resources (HCD9)	

Shared Factors Reporting No Significant Change

Regarding two particular factors, no significant change was reported in the intervention group or the control group. The factors were worship (FFM1) and stewardship (FFM6). ANOVA mean and change scores pertaining to the two factors that recorded no significant change are reported in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10. Factors with No Significant Change in Either Group

Factors	Intervention Group n=28			Control Group n=30		
	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$
FFM 1 (worship)	5.86	6.02	0.17	5.31	5.49	0.18
FFM 6 (stewardship)	4.99	5.43	0.44	4.36	4.57	0.21

Shared Factors Reporting Significant Change

Data pertaining to four factors showed significant change in both the intervention group and the control group. The factors were service (FFM4), prayer (FFM5), spiritual growth (FFM8), and intimacy with God (HCD7). ANOVA mean and change scores pertaining to the four factors that recorded significant change are reported in Table 4.11 .

Table 4.11. Factors with Significant Change in Both Groups

Factors	Intervention Group n=28			Control Group n=30		
	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$
FFM 4 (service)	4.89	6.02	1.13*	4.29	4.70	0.41*
FFM 5 (prayer)	4.74	5.30	0.92*	4.51	4.79	0.36*
FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	4.87	5.76	0.89*	4.00	4.43	0.43*
HCD 7 (intimacy w/God)	5.15	5.77	0.62*	4.76	5.11	0.36*

Although these factors represent the four highest scores for the control group, they do not represent the highest scores for the intervention group. The four highest scores for the intervention group are slightly different than the factors reported above.

The highest scores for the intervention group were found in the factors of evangelism (0.92), service (1.13), prayer (0.92), and spiritual growth (0.89).

Immediate Change Due to Orchard 101 Course

The intervention group showed the most change immediately following the Orchard 101 course at posttest one. A lesser degree of change was reported at posttest two in every factor except worship (FFM1), representing God in the world (HCD4), and intimacy with God (HCD7). The degree of change reported in the area of fully functioning membership for the intervention group showed immediate change in six of eight factors. The reported degree of change pertaining to the area of highly committed discipleship in the intervention group showed immediate change in five of nine factors. The only factor that showed statistically significant change between posttest one and posttest two was spiritual growth [$\text{FFM8}(t_3 - t_2) = 0.39$]. The factors that showed immediate change following the Orchard 101 intervention with $t_2 - t_1$ scores listed were: fellowship ($\text{FFM2} = 0.51$), evangelism ($\text{FFM3} = 0.81$), service ($\text{FFM4} = 0.83$), prayer ($\text{FFM5} = 0.56$), care ($\text{FFM7} = 0.50$), placing discipleship as number one priority ($\text{HCD2} = 0.42$), obeying God ($\text{HCD3} = 0.58$), being trained by God's word ($\text{HCD6} = 0.38$), making new disciples ($\text{HCD8} = 0.77$), and stewarding resources ($\text{HCD9} = 0.64$). These findings are summarized in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12. Immediate Change Following Orchard 101

Factors	Intervention Group n=28			Control Group n=30		
	$\Delta(t_2-t_1)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_2)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$	$\Delta(t_2-t_1)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_2)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$
FFM 1 (worship)	0.05	0.12	0.17	0.16	0.02	0.18
FFM 2 (fellowship)	0.51*	0.27	0.79*	-0.08	0.24	0.17
FFM 3 (evangelism)	0.81*	0.11	0.92*	0.06	0.28*	0.33
FFM 4 (service)	0.83*	0.30	1.13*	-0.04	0.46*	0.41*
FFM 5 (prayer)	0.56*	0.36	0.92*	0.28	0.08	0.36*
FFM 6 (stewardship)	0.38	0.06	0.44	0.09	0.12	0.21
FFM 7 (care)	0.56*	0.14	0.70*	0.16	0.08	0.23
FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	0.50*	0.39*	0.89*	0.36*	0.08	0.43*
HCD 1 (assured of salvation)	0.24	0.11	0.35*	0.09	0.09	0.18
HCD 2 (disc. as first priority)	0.42*	0.12	0.54*	0.30*	-0.07	0.23
HCD 3 (obey God)	0.58*	0.19	0.77*	0.06	0.21	0.27
HCD 4 (represent God)	0.21	0.35	0.56*	0.14	0.01	0.16
HCD 5 (serving/caring)	0.27	0.14	0.42*	0.08	-0.10	-0.02
HCD 6 (trained by bible)	0.38*	0.19	0.57*	0.07	0.12	0.19
HCD 7 (intimacy w/ God)	0.30	0.32	0.62*	0.22	0.13	0.36*
HCD 8 (making new disciples)	0.77*	-0.17	0.61*	-0.01	0.12	0.11
HCD 9 (stewarding resources)	0.64*	0.25	0.89*	-0.03	-0.09	-0.12

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ or less level

$\Delta(t_2-t_1)$ = degree of change from pre-test to post-test one

$\Delta(t_3-t_2)$ = degree of change from post-test one to post-test two

$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$ = cumulative degree of change over all three tests

Difference in Degree of Change between Groups

The data results can be construed to show three factors where Orchard 101 was strongest and weakest in eliciting change within participants by evaluating the comparison between total change scores of the intervention group and the control group. Table 4.13 summarizes the difference between groups.

Table 4.13. Degree of Change Differences

Factors	Intervention Group n=28	Control Group n=30	Difference
	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$	$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$	IG Δ - CG Δ
FFM 1 (worship)	0.17	0.18	-0.01
FFM 2 (fellowship)	0.79	0.17	0.62*
FFM 3 (evangelism)	0.92	0.33	0.59
FFM 4 (service)	1.13	0.41	0.72*
FFM 5 (prayer)	0.92	0.36	0.56*
FFM 6 (stewardship)	0.44	0.21	0.23
FFM 7 (care)	0.70	0.23	0.47
FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	0.89	0.43	0.46*
HCD 1 (assured of salvation)	0.35	0.18	0.17
HCD 2 (disc. as first priority)	0.54	0.23	0.31
HCD 3 (obey God)	0.77	0.27	0.50
HCD 4 (represent God)	0.56	0.16	0.40
HCD 5 (serving/caring)	0.42	-0.02	0.44*
HCD 6 (trained by bible)	0.57	0.19	0.38
HCD 7 (intimacy w/ God)	0.62	0.36	0.26
HCD 8 (making new disciples)	0.61	0.11	0.50
HCD 9 (stewarding resources)	0.89	-0.12	1.01*

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ or less level

$\Delta(t_3-t_1)$ = cumulative degree of change over all three tests

IG Δ - CG Δ = total change for control group subtracted from intervention group

The three factors where the greatest difference exists between the intervention group and the control group are stewarding resources (HCD9 = 1.01), service (FFM4 = 0.72), and fellowship (FFM2 = 0.62). The three factors where the least difference exists between the intervention group and the control group are stewardship (FFM6 = 0.23), assurance of salvation (HCD1 = 0.17), and worship (FFM1 = -0.01). The factor of worship actually showed slightly more change in the control group, but neither the control group nor the intervention group scored a statistically significant degree of change in regards to the factor of worship.

Highs and Lows

The three factors with the highest degree of change shown in the intervention group were all found in the fully functioning membership area. The three factors were service (FFM4 = 1.13), evangelism (FFM3 = 0.92), and prayer (FFM5 = 0.92). The three highest factors are all reported from the same area—fully functioning membership. The highest factor reported by the intervention group in the other area of the study, highly committed discipleship, was stewarding resources (HCD9 = 0.89).

The three factors with the highest degree of change reported by the control group were spiritual growth (FFM8 = 0.43), service (FFM4 = 0.41), and a tie between intimacy with God (HCD7 = 0.36) and prayer (FFM5 = 0.36). The factor of service is a top-three factor for both the intervention and control group.

The three factors with the lowest degree of change reported by the intervention group were serving/caring (HCD5 = 0.42), assurance of salvation (HCD1 = 0.35), and worship (FFM1 = 0.17).

The three factors with the lowest degree of change reported by the control group were making new disciples (HCD9 = 0.11), serving/caring (HCD5 = -0.02), and stewarding resources (HCD = -0.12). The serving/caring factor (HCD5) is the only one in the bottom three for both the intervention and control group, but the factor still shows significant change from the intervention group.

The factor with the greatest difference between the control and intervention groups was stewarding resources. The intervention group showed an overall change of 0.89 while the control group showed an overall change of -0.12. The total difference between the two was 1.01. Table 4.14 summarizes information regarding highs and lows.

Table 4.14. – High and Low Factors

Intervention Group				Control Group			
n = 28	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3t_1)$	n = 30	T ₁ Mean	T ₃ Mean	$\Delta(t_3t_1)$
FFM 4 (service)	4.89	6.02	1.13*	FFM 8 (spiritual growth)	4.00	4.43	0.43*
FFM 3 (evangelism)	3.55	4.46	0.92*	FFM 4 (service)	4.29	4.70	0.41*
FFM 5 (prayer)	4.74	5.65	0.92*	HCD 7 (intimacy w/ God)	4.76	5.11	0.36*
HCD 9 (stewarding)	4.35	5.24	0.89*	FFM 5 (prayer)	4.51	4.87	0.36*
HCD 5 (serving/caring)	5.40	5.82	0.42	HCD 8 (make disc.)	3.79	3.90	0.11
HCD 1 (salvation)	6.18	6.52	0.35	HCD 5 (serve/care)	5.42	5.40	-0.02
FFM 1 (worship)	5.86	6.02	0.17	HCD 9 (steward resc.)	4.30	4.18	-0.12

* indicates statistically significant changes at the $p < .05$ or less level

The Relationships between Previous Involvement and Self-Reported Change

The fourth research question was, “What demographic differences in the two audiences might also account for any observed differences in their self-reported answers?”

Demographic frequency distributions include information regarding age and gender, as well as answers to four questions that relate to previous faith and church involvement. The questions pertaining to previous faith involvement were “Are you one hundred percent confident that you are a Christian?” (PFI1) and “How many years ago did you become a Christian?” (PFI2). The questions pertaining to previous church involvement were, “How many years ago were you involved in a church other than The Orchard?” (PCI1) and “How active were you?” (PCI2). The demographic frequency distributions are presented in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15. Frequency of Demographic Distribution

Demographic Data		Intervention Group		Control Group	
		n= 28	Percent	n=30	Percent
Gender	Male	14	50	14	46.7
	Female	14	50	16	53.4
Age	13-17	1	3.6	6	20
	18-30	7	25	4	13.3
	31-40	7	25	9	30
	41-50	10	35.7	8	26.7
	51-60	3	10.7	3	10
PFI#1 (above)	Yes	24	85.7	26	86.7
	No	0	0	1	3.3
	Change	4	14.3	3	10
PFI#2 (above)	<1	4	14.3	4	13.3
	1-2	1	3.6	2	6.7
	3-5	1	3.6	2	6.7
	6-8	2	7.2	2	6.7
	9-12	4	14.3	2	6.7
	13-20	7	25	0	0
	21+	9	32.1	18	59.9
PCI#1 (above)	<1	6	21.4	7	23.3
	1-2	1	3.6	10	33.3
	3-5	4	14.3	4	13.3
	6-8	2	7.2	2	6.7
	9-12	3	10.7	2	6.7
	13-20	5	17.6	2	6.7
	21+	7	25	3	10
PCI#2 (above)	very active	6	21.4	9	30
	somewhat active	11	39.3	8	26.7
	worship only	11	39.3	13	43.3

The demographic frequency distributions show several interesting findings. One, the control group was much younger than the intervention group. Two, the control group and the intervention group were almost identical in regards to previous faith involvement, including new decisions to follow Christ. Three, the previous church involvement for the

control group was more recent, and a higher percent consider themselves to be very active in church.

The findings of the study show that Orchard 101 helps people grow as members in the Orchard and disciples in their personal life. Furthermore, the findings reveal Orchard 101 and Orchard church strengths and weaknesses, and the findings reveal two types of stewardship at work within the Orchard church. The findings did not reveal conclusive information related to previous faith or church involvement.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The beginnings of this dissertation project can be traced back to my desire to grow a church that would be a beacon of faith, hope, and love in East Atlanta; a church that would be made up of real people who actively lead others to a real Savior. I felt that God was calling me to create a new church that would meet real needs as it was compelled by a real God to do so; a church full of people who are so contagious with authentic Christian life that non-believing, dechurched, and unchurched people are drawn by the hundreds and thousands to experience Jesus for themselves.

I believed that growing a dynamic church would require a membership standard that was life giving and mission oriented; a standard where each member would endeavor to transform the world around them as they were transformed themselves. At the Orchard the core value of meaningful membership is a vital part of our mission. Part of the core value is listed below:

Membership is a covenant we make with God and other members to accomplish the mission and purposes of The Orchard. A member is someone who has felt called by God to move from primarily being a consumer of church programming to primarily being a provider of life-changing ministry.

The doorway to membership, I believed, was one of the key ingredients for growing a healthy and dynamic congregation.

With meaningful membership in mind, I created a doorway to membership originally called Roots, then Orchard 101. The goal of the course is, in part, to clearly outline several key expectations for membership that are supported by scripture and seek to help create a healthy and dynamic congregation.

This project has attempted to measure the doorway to membership at the Orchard Church in Loganville, Georgia. Full participation in the Orchard 101 Membership Course is a requirement for every member in The Orchard Church. Because the church is only four years old, there is no member on the roll who has not taken Orchard 101.

A researcher-designed instrument called the Spirituality Assessment was used to measure the self-reported degree of change in participants of Orchard 101. The assessment was given just prior to Orchard 101, within two weeks of the end of Orchard 101, and then again three months after Orchard 101 ended. The assessment sought to evaluate the degree of change related to seventeen factors that defined fully functioning membership within the Orchard and highly committed discipleship in all areas of living. Fifty-one questions were used with three questions relating to each of the seventeen factors. Six demographic questions were also used as part of the instrument to evaluate the effect of previous faith and church involvement upon the factors in the study. A control group who did not take Orchard 101, but who received the same pre-post-post spirituality assessments at the same time as the 101 participants, was used to help evaluate the effectiveness of the Orchard 101 course.

Evaluation and Interpretation

The data shows a significant degree of change relating to fifteen of seventeen factors in the interpretation group and four of seventeen factors in the control group. It appears that the Orchard 101 course had positive bearing upon both areas of the study; fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship. The data reveals several findings.

Orchard 101 Helping People Grow

Overall, the Orchard 101 course is an important ingredient for creating a ministry environment at the Orchard where a large portion of members are fully functioning within the membership expectations and where disciples are highly committed participants in faith. The data shows that the group of Orchard 101 participants expressed change in fifteen of seventeen of the factors being studied while the control group only showed growth in four of the seventeen factors being studied. The research data also showed a higher degree of change in people immediately following the course than three months later. Several inferences can be made from this observation.

One, the Orchard 101 course serves as quick growth fertilizer in the growth process of Orchard members. It helps people take steps of faith they might not take otherwise. One is left to wonder if Orchard 101 were not required if members in The Orchard would receive the benefit of the apparent immediate growth following the course. The only factors that did not show growth immediately following Orchard 101 were worship involvement and stewardship involvement in terms of fully functioning membership. Change was reported in all other factors.

Two, continued growth was not expressed at the same rate as during the Orchard 101 course so a cause and effect relationship may exist between growing in the company of others (i.e., Orchard 101, small groups) and growing in relative isolation from others (i.e., large group events). The notion that growth is experienced best in a small group of people falls in line with the genius of the early Methodist movement. John Wesley organized the throngs of people who responded to evangelical preaching into strategically organized small group (Snyder, Radical Wesley 31; Werlein 22-28). Through the

societies, bands, and classes that the people of the early Methodist movement learned to live a full expression of Christian faith that included highly committed discipleship in all of life and fully functioning membership in the society, band, or class.

Three, any small group teaching environment similar to Orchard 101 in nature can have the same effect as Orchard 101 in that it could help people learn to live a full expression of Christian faith because they are joined with others on the journey.

Four, the data shows that an intensive course may be a good way to achieve a change in behavior regarding many different topics. A course on money management or healthy marital relationships, for example, might have the same effect as the Orchard 101 course.

Orchard 101 Strengths Revealed

The data shows that participants experienced growth in all nine factors relating to the area of highly committed discipleship and in six of eight areas relating to fully functioning membership. The data shows that the course not only helps participants become involved as members in the Orchard; it also helps participants become more active and committed disciples in other areas of living that may or may not be related to church activities and church friends. The primary strengths of Orchard 101 relating to the intervention are found in three factors that show the greatest difference of change between the intervention group and the control group (see Table 4.13 p.111). Those three factors where participants reported the greatest degree of change when compared to the control group were stewarding God's resources (HCD9), service (FFM4), and fellowship (FFM2). The questions relating to these factors are listed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Assessment Questions Relating to Factors HCD9, FFM4, and FFM2

Factors	Questions from Spirituality Assessment
HCD9 Stewarding Resources	9. Do you consider God's will when making major financial purchases? 26. Do you give financially to your local church? 43. Do you ever think about the idea that you are just using or enjoying something that God has created for you?
FFM4 Service	13. Weekly, how often do you serve others through a "Serve Team" at the Orchard? 30. Do you consider being able to serve others who do not yet understand Jesus a privilege? 47. How often do you find personal fulfillment and/or spiritual growth from serving others?
FFM2 Fellowship	11. On a weekly basis, do you ever "hang-out" with church friends? 28. How often to you attend church events other than weekly worship? 45. How often do you have meaningful conversations at church events?

When evaluating the apparent strengths of the intervention through the lens of the individual questions, change took place in the stewarding resources and service factors; while a study of the FFM2 questions show that the change in the factor of fellowship was most likely self-fulfilling simply because of involvement with the course itself. In regards to stewarding God's resources the participants in Orchard 101 gained a greater

appreciation for God's creation around them, began to think of financial resources within the context of discipleship, and began to give financially to the Orchard.

The factor of stewarding God's resources (HCD9) showed the greatest degree of change pertaining to the area of highly committed discipleship. I would guess that one of the reasons this type of stewardship showed the greatest degree of change is because the biblical ideal of stewardship rubs against the grain of modern thinking about wealth and passions. The Orchard 101 course teaches that everything belongs to God—even money, relationships, and personal talents. Orchard 101 helps people step away from the teaching of this world and toward a biblical understanding of stewardship. Another reason that the factor of stewarding God's resources may have ranked so high is related to question twenty-six of the Spirituality Assessment. Involvement in the Orchard 101 class may have engendered more ownership in the Orchard from participants; thus, a greater desire to support the ministries of the Orchard financially may have flowed naturally from a greater sense of ownership regardless of biblical teaching.

In regards to service (FFM4), participants in the Orchard 101 course became more active, tied service activity to evangelism, and gained greater personal fulfillment from service activities. The strength of service at the Orchard resonates well with the focus of ministry in the Orchard and the church's Methodist heritage. If nothing else, Methodists have been known for practical service in the world. One of the hallmarks of Wesleyan faith is that it should be practical in nature, not existing in the ivory towers of academia or the sacred halls of religious buildings only, but in the everyday lives of real people. Wesley modeled the reality of service in his own life and called early Methodists to make a real difference in the world around them by moving toward perfection in the love of

God and neighbor (Langford 25-27; Stokes, Our Methodist Heritage 45-54; Scriptural Holiness 35-40).

At the Orchard church we have created a culture of service, beginning the very first day of worship. Every member is expected to serve others by volunteering for one of twenty-one different serve teams within the Orchard. On many occasions I have uttered the phrase, “The missing ingredient of Christianity in America is serving others.” We recognize service as central to spiritual growth at the Orchard church. In fact, we argue that genuine Christian experience cannot happen apart from intentional actions to love others.

The discovery that the factor of service is a strength of the Orchard 101 course is not surprising. It is supported by a culture of service within the Orchard and a heritage of service that flows from Wesley and the early Methodists to modern United Methodists.

On the other hand, a particular perceived strength of the Orchard 101 Course was most likely only a predetermined strength by virtue of involvement in the course itself. The factor of fellowship (FFM2) showed the third highest difference in degree of change between the intervention group and control group, but on second look at the individual questions, each participant in Orchard 101 could have easily experienced change in this area, just by virtue of attending the course. Nevertheless, even though the strength is limited by its self-fulfilling nature, the factor of fellowship is still a strength because participants identify developing friends and have a greater degree of meaningful conversation during the intervention period and beyond.

Orchard 101 Weaknesses Revealed

The data shows that people in the intervention group reported change in fifteen of seventeen factors while the control group reported change in only four of seventeen factors. The primary weaknesses of the intervention appear to be in found in three factors that show the least difference of change between the intervention group and the control group. The finding show the weakest factors relating to Orchard 101 to be assurance of salvation (HCD1), worship (FFM1), and stewardship (FFM6). Assurance of salvation (HCD1) as represented in the intervention group is the only factor where a significant degree of change was reported, but the factor still expressed a low amount of difference in degree of change when compared to the same factor as reported by the control group. The questions from the Spirituality Assessment relating to these factors are listed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Assessment Questions Relating to FFM6, HCD1, and FFM1

Factors	Questions from Spirituality Assessment
HCD1 Assurance of Salvation	<p>1. Do you easily identify yourself as one who has experienced salvation through Jesus?</p> <p>18. Do you have confidence that you will be a follower of Jesus your whole life?</p> <p>35. How often do you doubt the existence of God?</p>
FFM1 Worship	<p>10. How often do you attend weekly worship?</p> <p>27. How often do you believe you grow spiritually through your weekly worship experiences?</p> <p>44. How often do you leave worship not really having felt God's presence?</p>
FFM6 Stewardship	<p>15. Do you serve God in ways that are consistent with your personal talents or aptitudes?</p> <p>32. How often do you plan ahead to give a certain percentage of your monthly income?</p> <p>49. How often do you believe you serve others in ways that are in alignment with your personal gifts, abilities, and aptitudes?</p>

After creating something like Orchard 101 to help a congregation become healthy and vibrant, one would hope that it would help people in every factor, but the apparent weaknesses revealed in Orchard 101 lead one to conclude the course can be improved to address the factors above.

The factor of assurance of salvation may be reported as weak because, according to Wesleyan theological heritage, recognition of the assurance of salvation is both a technical assurance based on a decision of the will and an ongoing process that comes as a gift from God in the process of Christian maturity. As stated in Romans 8:16-17, the Spirit of God ultimately gives the assurance that followers of Jesus really are children of God (Wesley and Burwash 176-77). A teaching course could not hope to replicate something that only God's Spirit can fully give to the believer.

The factor of assurance of salvation may be reported as weak for another reason as well. Just over 85 percent of participants responded positively to the demographic question, "Are you one hundred percent confident that you are a Christian?" Given the questions relating to the assurance of salvation factor and the demographic profile little opportunity for a reported significant degree of change existed. Of note however, the intervention group showed a significant level of change in this area at the lowest level that was statistically significant ($HCD1 = 0.35$, $p < .05$).

Unlike the questions, the demographic data points to the idea that the HCD1 factor may actually be a strength of the Orchard 101 course after all. Of the twenty-eight people in the intervention group only four of them responded that they were not one hundred percent confident that they were Christians. All four of these people changed their response to one hundred percent confident over the course of the testing period. So, in terms of the whole group, there was only a small degree of change, but in terms of these four individuals, lasting and eternal change was reported. The data shows that the parts of Orchard 101 that relate to the factor of assurance of salvation show little need for revisions.

The factor of worship (FFM1) is also an area of weakness in the Orchard 101 course. The course was not successful in helping people attend worship more often, grow spiritually from worship experiences, or feel connected to God during worship. The fact that the worship factor is a weakness of the Orchard 101 course may actually point to the conclusion that the worship experience itself is actually weak. Thinking back to the testing periods, an intervening variable may have been at work in the reporting of this factor (although this project does not attempt to address intervening variables). During the testing period, the Orchard Church was working through a message series called “40 Days of Family.” The series focused on the core values of the Orchard and included a parallel small group curriculum that was a written in-house. According to unanimous agreement from leaders of The Orchard, the 40 Days of Family efforts were one of the least successful in four years of ministry. The 40 days of Family was not connecting with people by the end of this eight-week long series. The material in Orchard 101 could most likely be improved as it relates to the factor of worship, but one is left to wonder what the data may have concluded if the intervening variable of the message series would have been different.

A faulty focus may exist in the Spirituality assessment questions regarding the factor of worship. The questions describe worship as a place where one goes to get something from God, but worship at its best is much more than receiving. As discovered in literary precedents, worship at its best is more about giving than getting. Worship “ought not be construed in a utilitarian way” (Dawn 1; Webber 38). The right questions about worship have less to do with what one accomplishes in worship and more to do with whom one represents in worship. Jesus is at the center of every authentic

Christian worship experience. Worship at its best is not about improving a marriage, or learning to study the Bible better, or being ecstatic through music, prayer, celebration, or speaking in tongues. The best worship celebrates Christ's victory over death and evil because of his resurrection and suffering and the promise of the "not yet fully present" but "already here" coming kingdom of God. If the questions in the Spirituality Assessment do not ask the right questions of worship, then one would not expect them to show change even if the respondents were immersed in life-altering, intimate worship.

The last area of weakness revealed by comparing total change scores between the two groups is the area of stewardship (FFM6). The results of the study show that the Orchard 101 course failed in its attempt to help people plan for giving and connect God-given personal gifts to individual areas of service. Two types of stewardship were discovered at the Orchard. The FFM6 type was weak and the other was strong. They are discussed below.

Two Types of Stewardship

Regarding the area of highly committed discipleship the factor of stewarding God's resources (HCD9) was reported with the fourth highest degree of change and the greatest difference in degree of change between the control group and the intervention group. Concurrently, in the area of fully functioning membership, the factor of stewardship (FFM6) was only one of two areas that reported a nonsignificant degree of change for the intervention group and a low difference in degree of change between the control and intervention groups. A post-project analysis of the questions relating to the two stewardship areas reveals that the factor questions were asking about two different

types of stewardship. The Spirituality Assessment questions relating to HCD9 and FFM6 are listed side by side in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3. Spirituality Assessment Questions Relating to Stewardship Factors

HCD9 Stewarding God's Resources (significant change = 0.89 at $p < .05$ level)	FFM6 Stewardship (non-significant change = 0.44 at $p < .05$ level)
9. Do you consider God's will when making major financial purchases?	15. Do you serve God in ways that are consistent with your personal talents or aptitudes?
26. Do you give financially to your local church?	32. How often do you plan ahead to give a certain percentage of your monthly income?
43. Do you ever think about the idea that you are just using or enjoying something that God has created for you?	49. How often do you believe you serve others in ways that are in alignment with your personal gifts, abilities, and aptitudes?

The data, in conjunction with a review of the questions, reveals that Orchard 101 most likely helps people change actual giving habits and helps them attain a greater sense of God's ownership for all things, including creation (see HCD9 questions in Table 5.3). The HCD9 type of stewardship might be called "appreciation and action" stewardship. Testing results show significant change for the intervention group in this area while the control group did not experience significant change. The results of the data show that the Orchard 101 course did help elicit change in participants regarding "appreciation and action" stewardship.

Conversely, the questions relating to FFM6 reveal a second type of stewardship. In this stewardship factor, a significant degree of change was not reported by participants

in the intervention group, and a low difference in degree of change was reported between the intervention and control groups. This type of stewardship is more related to planning ahead for a “first fruits” offering to God (some might construe it as tithing) and connecting personal God-given gifts and talents to specific areas of ministry. The FFM6 type of stewardship could be called first fruits and gifts stewardship. Neither the control group nor the intervention group reported significant change in the FFM6 stewardship factor. A low difference in degree of change between the control group and the intervention group was also reported. The Orchard 101 course did not help people change in the “first fruits and giving” stewardship factor relating to fully functioning membership.

In accordance with Wesley’s call for Christians to be stewards of all of their resources and to use everything they have to fulfill God’s purposes the Orchard church is helping people move forward in the spiritual discipline of stewardship. The Orchard church is most likely failing, though, at helping people make the connection between God-given personal talents and using them for his glory. We have taught about stewardship of money and creation well, but not stewardship of gifts and talents. This conclusion is surprising because a whole section of Orchard 101 is devoted to discovering personal gifts and talents. The error may lie more in developing a culture within the Orchard that naturally identifies, recruits, celebrates, and uses personal God-given gifts and talents than in the Orchard 101 course itself.

A Question of Preparation for Growth

The Orchard 101 group started the course with higher mean scores relating to fully functioning membership at the pre-test (see Table 4.3 p.99). This fact may show that

intervention group members were motivated to take Orchard 101 because they were already involved in Orchard ministries at some level or had already experienced a certain degree of change through the ministries of the Orchard. Logically, a person who experiences spiritual growth through an organization would want to join the organization formally so that they could continue to experience growth.

The pattern for reception into the groups that made up the early Methodist movement and the pattern for membership in the first Methodist churches was different from the pattern that currently exists at the Orchard. The pattern at the Orchard is typically Orchard 101, then baptism, then membership. The pattern in early Methodism, however, was baptism, then catechetical training (or probation), then membership (Norwood, Church Membership 34-35). Figure 5.1 outlines the differences between entry into early Methodist churches and the Orchard church. These differences highlight the idea that although Orchard 101 is the gate or doorway for technical entry into the Orchard church as member, it should not be the only means for assimilation. Members of the early Methodist church typically experienced profound change through baptism before entering into a probationary period. If the Orchard church desires to be as effective in ministry as the early Methodist churches, then the assimilation systems and ministry of the Orchard need to illicit profound spiritual change leading to baptism prior to Orchard 101.

Church	Patterns for Membership		
	<u>Step One</u>	<u>Step Two</u>	<u>Step Three</u>
Early Methodist	Baptism	Probation/Catechism	Membership
The Orchard	Orchard101/Catechism	Baptism	Membership

Figure 5.1. Different Patterns for Membership.

Orchard Church Strengths Uncovered

Four factors reported a significant degree of change in both the control and intervention groups, leading one to conclude that there are intervening variables at play in the Orchard which precipitate change in attenders regardless of participation in the Orchard 101 course.

The four factors that reported change in the control group and intervention group were service (FFM4), prayer (FFM5), spiritual growth (FFM8), and intimacy with God (HCD7) (see Table 4.11 for statistical data p.108). Table 5.4 lists the Spirituality Assessment questions related to these four factors.

Table 5.4 Questions from Factors Relating to Orchard Church Strengths

Factors	Questions from Spirituality Assessment
FFM4 Service	<p>13. Weekly, how often do you serve others through a “Serve Team” at the Orchard?</p> <p>30. Do you consider being able to serve others who do not yet understand Jesus a privilege?</p> <p>47. How often do you find personal fulfillment and/or spiritual growth from serving others?</p>
FFM5 Prayer	<p>14. How often do you pray specifically for the needs of other people?</p> <p>31. How often do you pray for the Orchard to complete her mission successfully?</p> <p>48. On a weekly basis, how often do you pray with others?</p>
FFM6 Spiritual Growth	<p>17. Are you involved with a Grow Group on a weekly basis?</p> <p>34. How often do you use spiritual principles that you learned about at worship or in a small group in daily situations?</p> <p>51. On a weekly basis, are you learning things at the Orchard that are helping you follow Jesus?</p>
HCD7 Intimacy with God	<p>7. How often do you miss daily devotional time with God?</p> <p>24. Do you maintain the practice of regular worship?</p> <p>41. Do you spend daily time in prayer for yourself and others?</p>

Responses to the questions point to the idea that, even outside of the instruction of the Orchard 101 course, the ministry systems and culture of the Orchard Church support personal growth in the factors of service, prayer, spiritual growth, and intimacy with God. In particular, the data supports the idea that these ministry systems within the Orchard

move people effectively on a continuum from attendance in worship to a place of greater involvement.

The degree of change shown regarding the factors that include questions 13, 17, and 48 from the Spirituality Assessment (see Appendix A) reveal that Orchard worship attenders are moving forward to be involved with serve teams, grow groups, and prayer times with other people. The model for ministry involvement at The Orchard Church is “Worship+ 2.” “Worship+2” is defined as regular worship plus a place to grow deep (small group) and a place to serve others (serve team). The results show evidence that supports the idea that Orchard attenders are experiencing positive change toward fulfilling the “Worship +2” model for ministry involvement. The fact that the service factor show strength both in Orchard 101 and in the broader ministries of the Orchard points to the idea that service is a dominant and distinctive characteristic of the Orchard church. Service is something we should use to increase the effectiveness of other areas.

Other responses point to change in Orchard Church attenders regarding several areas of their spiritual journey: a more active prayer life (questions 30 and 47), the real-life application of spiritual principles (questions 34 and 51), and a more active personal devotional time (questions 7, 24, and 41).

The results of the data are not surprising—Orchard attenders report a more active prayer life. Prayer has always been a key ingredient in the mission of the Orchard. Meetings end or begin with communal prayer where everyone is invited to pray instead of the more typical perfunctory opening and closing prayer. Many people have prayed out loud for the first time in the Orchard because of our unique and friendly approach to prayer. One of the distinctive ministries in the Orchard is the Sunday morning prayer

circle. About thirty to forty people typically gather for prayer at 8:55 every Sunday morning. The group is not a special prayer team, but a collection of servants who were already present to minister in areas ranging from children's ministries to audio visual support to hospitality to stage design. For many Orchard people, this occasion marks the first time they have prayed in a public environment. The Sunday morning prayer time is the perfect time to recalibrate our mission and to remind people about the best reason for service. The time also provides an opportunity for new Christians to hear a more confident believer address God as person, leader, and savior. The different prayer environments in the Orchard appear to help people grow effectively.

The results show the factors of spiritual growth and intimacy with God as Orchard strengths. One of the variables that could have come into play might be the Orchard's focus upon reaching unchurched, dechurched, and nonbelieving people. The congregation is made up of a collection of mature believers and new believers, but over 60 percent of the members of the Orchard came by profession of faith. They are new or renewed believers who are experiencing God in new ways. They are growing because they have so much to learn. An example of the learning curve that exists regarding spiritual growth in the Orchard is a man I will call Kale. One time when I was visiting with him he said, "Ben, I have a bible question." I prepared my mind to think theologically and got ready for his question. Kale walked over to get his bible, opened, and pointed to a page. Kale's question was, "What do the big numbers stand for?" I explained to him that they divided chapters to help people find certain passages of scripture. Kale responded that he had read through Exodus 10 and wanted to know how to pronounce the word Esau. The Orchard has been blessed to reach many people like Kale, helping them grow spiritually.

Orchard Church Weaknesses Uncovered

Two factors did not report a significant degree of change in the control or intervention groups, leading one to conclude that these factors may represent weaknesses within the ministry systems and structures of The Orchard Church. The two factors were worship (FFM1), and stewardship (FFM2) (see Table 4.11 for statistical data p.108). Table 5.2 p.124 lists the Spirituality Assessment questions related to these two factors. The findings relating to the worship and stewardship factors lead one to conclude that the people and leaders of the Orchard Church need to shore up two vital areas of ministry in the following ways: (1) by finding ways to help make worship times more meaningful by connecting people to meaningful experiences of God's presence in worship and by helping people grow spiritually during the week because of their worship times, and (2) by finding ways to help people become "first fruits" financial givers and connect their acts of service to their unique God-given gifts and talents.

Conclusions Relating to Previous Faith and Church Involvement

Only one data correlation exists regarding demographic questions that could help explain a difference in the self-reported degree of change. The correlation is that the control group was slightly younger than the intervention group. The control group included six people (20 percent) who were in the 13-17 age range while the intervention group only included one person (3.6 percent) in this age range. However, on the other end of the age spectrum, 71.4 percent of the intervention group subjects were 31 years or older while only 66.7 percent of the control group subjects were 31 years or older. If the lives of younger people are more open to change than older people then the demographic data regarding age range might point to the idea that this intervening variable allowed for

a greater reported degree of change in the control group than might have been reported if the intervention and control group subjects were exactly the same ages. Thus, an even greater difference in the self-reported degree of change between the groups may have been reported if the intervention and control group subjects were more similar in age.

The other data results regarding demographic data (see Table 4.15 p.114) do not hold enough statistical power to discuss significant conclusions. One reason is because the intervention group and the control group reported nearly identical demographic data. Similarities include the following:

1. Fifty-eight subjects who participated in the study. Twenty-eight were male and thirty were female.
2. The intervention and control groups both contained four people who were not one hundred percent confident that they were Christian. All four people in the intervention group changed responses to one hundred percent confidence over the testing period, and three of four people in the control group changed responses to one hundred percent confidence over the same testing period.
3. In terms of previous church involvement, nine people from the control group reported that they were very active, and six people from the intervention group reported the same. On the opposite end of the spectrum balance is found as thirteen people in the control group report previous church involvement as “worship only,” and eleven people from the intervention group report the same.

Relation to Previous Studies

No known prior study exists that measures the degree of change in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in a specific membership

course at a local Christian church; however, the known study that stands in closest relation to this project is one study led by Rainer. The conclusions of the study are discussed in High Expectations. Rainer and his team studied the assimilation systems of 287 local Baptist churches ranging demographically from open country rural to large city suburbs, and ranging in attendance from over 1,500 people to less than one hundred. The primary conclusion of the book that relates to this project is that churches with higher expectations for members and required membership classes are better at retaining members and closing the back door of member exodus. Findings revealed that 72.7 percent of the researched churches “required or expected” members to attend a new member class (High Expectations 104). The study by Rainer also showed a relationship between attendance expectations for the new member course and member retention. The research indicated that a distinct difference was evident among churches that simply offered a new member class, churches that expected new members to attend such a class, and churches that required attendance. In churches that offered a membership class but “neither required nor expected” attendance, the member retention rate was only 72 percent. To clarify, only 72 percent of the new members remained somewhat active two years following membership. In churches that “expected but did not require” a membership class, the member retention rate was more substantial at 89 percent over a two-year period.

The most important finding from the Rainer study that relates to this project is about churches that “required” every new member to complete a membership class. In those churches where attendance at the membership class was a requirement, the average member retention rate was 112 percent. This rate means that worship attendance was

outpacing the rate of membership growth. To clarify, if one hundred new members joined “first church” in a given year with a 112 percent member retention rate, then the worship attendance at that church would grow by an average of 112 people per Sunday in a given year. (Rainer, High Expectations 104-06).

This project could have bearing upon Rainer’s study because it attempted to evaluate the self-reported degree of change in the participants of a membership course in a local church. Rainer concludes that the membership course is important for worship attendance growth and member retention in the local church. This project stands in agreement as it reports a positive association between a required membership course and personal growth in terms of daily discipleship and active member involvement in one particular local church. Rainer provides a list of topics that were presented in the new members course he studied (High Expectations 110), but this project measured how the participants in Orchard 101 engaged church membership activities and daily discipleship activities as a result of having taken the course.

Rainer’s study supports the idea that a new member course is needed and necessary to grow a local church and to retain members in a local church. This project adds to Rainer’s work in that it supports the idea that a membership course in a local church can make a positive difference in the lives of participants. The researcher-designed intervention (Orchard 101) appears to be a useful tool for helping people grow in terms of fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship in the context of one ministry environment in particular; The Orchard Church in Loganville, Georgia.

Implications for the Orchard Church

Over the last four years, the fact that the Orchard 101 course is required for membership has occasionally been met with criticism, and about a half-dozen people have turned away from participation in the Orchard after realizing that membership in the Orchard is much more than just a name on a roll. At times, leaders in the Orchard, including myself, have considered lowering member expectations and the commitment that Orchard 101 requires (six 1-1/2 hour sessions) because of pressure from those who have criticized the course and because of fears that the course was not really helping the mission of the Orchard. The results of this project affirm the perception that the Orchard 101 course is helpful to both the individual member and the mission of the Orchard. The Orchard 101 membership course appears to be an effective means for helping new members become active participants and those seeking a life in Jesus become highly committed disciples. The Orchard 101 course will remain a key ingredient for the overall assimilation strategy of the Orchard.

The results of this project also revealed some key areas for improvement, both in the Orchard 101 course and in the Orchard Church at large. The leaders and staff of the Orchard Church need to ask questions and formulate strategies regarding the low degree of change evident in the factors of worship and stewardship in terms of fully functioning membership. The control group did not report significant change in worship and stewardship, and the Orchard 101 course did not help intervention participants change in these areas either. A worship design team has already been developed at The Orchard to effectively plan, evaluate, and implement meaningful worship experiences. It is the hope of this pastor that the current work being done in The Orchard regarding worship

experiences will increase the overall meaningfulness for participants in future months.

One change being considered regarding worship is a clear orientation that is more about God's worthiness, character, and love than about getting something from worship.

Pertaining to the factor of stewardship, there were two primary weaknesses. First, Orchard attenders and members do not plan ahead to give financially. They do give, funding Orchard ministries with over \$200,000 in 2005, but they do not receive the blessing of planning ahead to give a first fruits offering or tithe. Moving into the future, the leadership teams at The Orchard Church will attempt to educate congregants more clearly about the faith components of financial giving that includes a prior agreement with God about how, what, when, and where to give financially in support of his kingdom purposes. Second, a disconnection between serving God and the stewardship of God-given gifts and talents exists in the Orchard. The leaders and staff of The Orchard need to continue to work to help build a culture in the Orchard where individual gifts for ministry are identified, appreciated, and taught.

The Orchard 101 course will also be reevaluated to see how it might better address growth issues in the areas of worship and stewardship. The course will also be reevaluated to give it a clearer Wesleyan focus. The course lacks explicit discussion about Wesley's small group system, radical stewardship principals, teachings on assurance of salvation, or definition of Christian perfection.

Lastly, the results of this project shed light on factors that appear to be addressed well, both in Orchard 101 participants and in the larger church body. These factors are service, prayer, spiritual growth, and intimacy with God. The Orchard church needs to

capitalize on these apparent strengths to help all factors report significant change over time.

Possible Orchard 101 Changes

Reflecting upon the six sessions of the Orchard 101 course, the results of the study, and theological precedents, session one (Beginning the Journey of Following Jesus) should be left almost just as it is. The session appears to do a good job of helping people become 100 percent confident that they are followers of Jesus. At the end of the session there is a section called “tips for following Jesus.” The Orchard should consider exchanging this section with one that focuses upon the assurance of salvation in the context of the marks of the new birth and Wesley’s understanding of both.

In session two (Small Groups and Methodism), the Orchard should add more information about how Methodism started through the system of bands, classes, and societies apart from the large revival and worship gatherings. One of the biblical case studies for small groups should be replaced with a case study about small groups in the early Methodist movement.

Session three (Gifts and Talents) needs a better paradigm for teaching about personal gifts and talents. The results showed that people in Orchard 101 became better servants through the course, but it did not show that Orchard 101 attenders successfully aligned acts of service with personal gifts and talents. A reason must exist that explains why the current Orchard 101 material, and ministry culture within the Orchard, do not help people make the connection between acts of service and personal gifts and talents. A follow-up questionnaire of some sort might be helpful in determining a good method for helping people align gifts and talents with actions of service in the future.

In session four (Two Big Scary Words) little change needs to be made. Orchard 101 showed it successfully helped people grasp a healthy vision for evangelism and begin sharing with the Orchard financially.

In session five (Mission and Core Ministry Values), the Orchard should find a better way to teach the core ministry values in the Orchard. Orchard 101 attenders are exposed to the core ministry values as thumbnail sketches, but they are not discussed in-depth. According to the results of the study regarding the factors of stewardship and worship, more attention on the core values relating to stewardship and worship in session five is necessary.

In session six (Membership Expectations) changes also need to be made. The results show that the session helps Orchard 101 attenders move into the worship + 2 model for ministry involvement when they were not previously involved.

Generalizations

Although the results of this project focus only upon a particular researcher-designed intervention used in the specific context of a particular local church, three plausible generalizations can be presented based on the findings of the study.

One, the motivation for the project emerged from a personal desire to see the membership commitment in local churches become a meaningful instrument for moving people toward highly committed discipleship and fully functioning membership. Based on the results of this project, one can conclude that a membership course similar to Orchard 101 is likely to illicit a significant degree of change in participants in terms of membership involvement and discipleship.

Two, the context of concern for the project was my experience serving as an ordained elder at two different United Methodist churches where the threshold for member requirements and expectations was very low. Almost all Christian churches have in place some kind of process for becoming a member. This study may prove helpful to churches that are seeking to help new members become fully functioning participants and highly committed disciples. The findings of the study support any desire among clergy and laity in local churches to establish a more rigorous process of membership that includes a required entry point similar to Orchard 101.

Lastly, the results revealed that the Orchard 101 course is most likely beneficial toward creating fully functioning members and highly committed disciples. In particular it helped illicit a significant degree of self-reported change in participants regarding the factors of fellowship, evangelism, service, prayer, care, spiritual growth, assurance of salvation, discipleship as first priority, obeying God's laws and commands, representing God in the world, serving and caring for others, being trained by God's word, making new disciples, and stewarding God's resources. A course similar to Orchard 101 might illicit similar results if used in the context of another local church.

Possible Applications

This dissertation project has possible applications in at least three areas: when designing an indigenous membership course for a particular local church, as a positive example for other pastors or church leaders seeking to implement a similar approach to membership in a church where resistance exists, and among United Methodist denominational officials who might consider a similar membership process as a means for church renewal.

The first application has to do with the Orchard 101 materials themselves. The Orchard 101 course materials are available in Appendix B. The results of this study report that the course had a significant positive effect pertaining to fifteen of the seventeen factors being studied. If another local church is seeking to implement a similar, indigenous course, then ideas presented in the Orchard 101 materials are free for the taking.

The second application has to do with the results of the study as they pertain to leaders in other local churches. In my experience, most membership systems in local churches, whether healthy or un-healthy, are engrained into the fabric the local church. The membership process is part of the culture of the church and easily becomes an immovable sacred call. Any pastor or lay leader who would choose to lead an effort to change membership requirements from low expectations to high expectations would most likely be challenged by those in the congregation who do not see the value or benefit of such a change. This project might be used as a positive example that exhibits the benefit of a required membership course that calls people to high expectations in membership.

This project might serve to support the change agents' point of view if proposals for change are met by criticism, fear, or misunderstanding.

The third application has to do with the results of the study as they pertain to possible use by denominational officials. One of the driving forces behind this project is the fact that the membership of the national United Methodist church has been in decline for decades. The review of literature and the findings of this study, show that a required membership course similar to Orchard 101 could be used by denominational officials to help turn the tide within the United Methodist Church. This study could have implications within the denominational context of the United Methodist Church and beyond. Would the United Methodist Church currently be experiencing growth instead of decline if membership were taken more seriously? This study, at least in part, helps to answer the question.

Limitations and Further Study

The time frame of the project was one of its limitations. Although twelve weeks is a good amount of time, it may not be a good predictor of ongoing spiritual growth. Member involvement and discipleship are lifetime endeavors, and expanding the assessment evaluations to a lengthier period of time between posttest two and posttest three would have helped this project gain a clearer sense of the effectiveness of the Orchard 101 membership course. A posttest three might also have helped the study, but one is left to wonder how a redundancy of testing might affect the participants.

Another limitation of the study has to do with the self-fulfilling nature of an experiment that measures change by using the exact same instrument three different times. Although the design of the study was never revealed to the subjects in the project,

human nature tells me that people naturally want to report improvement, even if they are reporting it anonymously. If I were to repeat the project, I would change each Spirituality Assessment to have a completely different layout by changing the order of questions and the look and feel of each assessment. The content would be preserved, but each assessment would look like a different test.

Another limitation of the study is the research questions themselves. In order to keep the scope of the study manageable, the only area of personal growth I have commented upon is the self-reported degree of change in participants. Although self-reported degree of change is a valuable tool for determining the usefulness of the Orchard 101 course in regards to fully functioning membership and highly committed discipleship, other measures exist that would have helped the findings of the study exhibit greater confidence. Nevertheless, measures beyond self-reported degree of change would have required an approach to the study that may have been too cumbersome for a single researcher who is also involved in full-time ministry to manage.

Another limitation of the study is that it was very specific in nature. The study focused solely upon the reported degree of change of subjects who attend one particular four year old United Methodist church in Loganville, Georgia, participated in a particular researcher-designed intervention, and were evaluated using a particular researcher-designed instrument. Thus, the results of the project have limited generalizability.

Further study upon the same subject in a similar environment could address each of the limitations listed above. The methodology, except for overall length of time, appears to have been strong, but the instrument and administration could both be improved.

Further study might also include better demographic questions that might reveal something more about how people of different genders, previous faith involvement, ages, and previous church involvement respond to an environment like Orchard 101. This study provided very limited results regarding demographic correlations.

Unexpected Conclusions

The most surprising finding of the study is that the factor of worship appeared not to be an Orchard Church strength during the testing period. Neither the intervention group nor the control group reported a significant degree of change and the difference in degree of change between the two groups was 0.01. Thus, one can assert that worship experiences in the Orchard simply did not connect with people in terms of fully functioning membership. The questions from the Spirituality Assessment were, “How often do you attend weekly worship?” “How often do you believe you grow spiritually through your weekly worship experiences?” and, “How often do you leave worship not really having felt God’s presence?” The worship leaders in the Orchard Church need to continue to work hard at helping people attend worship regularly and experience God in meaningful ways when they do.

Another unexpected conclusion of the study is that the results revealed two types of stewardship at work within minds of the participants in the control and intervention groups. The type of stewardship where significant degree of change was reported helps people change actual giving habits and helps them attain a greater sense of God’s ownership for all things, including creation. This type of stewardship might be called “appreciation and action” stewardship. Orchard 101 appeared to be helpful in regards to “appreciation and action” stewardship. Nevertheless, a second type of stewardship at

work. In this stewardship factor a significant degree of change was not reported by participants in the intervention group, and a low difference in degree of change was reported between the intervention and control groups. This type of stewardship is more related to planning ahead for a “first fruits” offering to God and connecting personal God-given gifts and talents to specific areas of ministry. One might call this second type of stewardship the “first fruits and gifts” type of stewardship. The most plausible reason that this type of stewardship reported a low degree of change is because participants in the intervention and control groups did not consider their acts of service aligned with personal gifts and talents. The disconnection between active service and the use of personal gifts is surprising, especially because one whole session of Orchard 101 is devoted to a discussion of personal passions, spiritual gifts, and personal style. Extensive assessments are also provided. The leaders of the Orchard Church need to do more to teach about gifts and to develop a church culture where God-given gifts and talents are identified and appreciated.

The final unexpected conclusion is that the demographic questions were not more useful in drawing conclusions about the project. Although the research question relating to demographic data was very limited in scope, the findings did not have enough statistical power to draw significant conclusions. Given the opportunity I would like to rewrite the demographic questions on the Spirituality Assessment so that this project could say something more about the bearing of previous faith involvement and previous church involvement upon the reported degree of change in participants of Orchard 101.

Theological Reflections

The foundational theological reflection for this project was found in Jesus' command to his first disciples to make new followers, help them to maturity, and send them back into the world (Matt. 28:18-20). Further theological reflections examined the role of the church (*ekklesia*) in the reign of God's kingdom (*basileia*). Nevertheless, as the project concludes, appropriate theological reflection should primarily be upon membership. After all, the one independent variable in the study was the administration of a course required for membership in a local church.

Little question exists about the fact that the initiation rite of baptism was accepted in the book of Acts (Acts 2:38-41), but does biblical support exist for rigorous or required catechetical training leading to baptism? One question that can be addressed theologically is if the process of Christian maturity should take place before membership in the local church or after membership.

On one end of the spectrum is the account from Acts 2:41, which is straightforward and simple. The verse reports that "those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church" (NLT). The separation between the sacrament of baptism and recognition as a member of the early Christian Church was little if any (Green, Evangelism in the Early Church 152; Latourette 118). On the other end of the spectrum, we recognize that the first disciples of Jesus spent months following Jesus before representing him in the world. As revealed in the Epistles, involvement and leadership in the local church came with very high moral standards. However, little reference as to when and how these standards were initiated exists in the New Testament. The one clear initiation rite into the family of God in scripture is baptism. All other

initiation rites or standards appear to vary from early church to early church. According to Paul's letters, the churches in Rome and Corinth are very different churches struggling with different problems and different local cultures.

In light of the biblical record regarding the formation of the early church the primary focus for any membership process should be the willful and independent decision of the participant to choose to profess faith in Jesus and follow him accordingly. For the new believer this will mean a celebration of the sacrament of baptism, and for the veteran believer who has previously been baptized the initiation rite should include some kind of public affirmation of faith in Jesus. Since the Bible is unclear as to whether catechism should come before or after baptism, the membership process is a secondary concern. Universal principles regarding the membership process or catechetical training in a local church cannot be adequately interpreted from Scripture. Therefore, the most appropriate membership process for any local church is the one that helps lead people to Jesus most effectively. Ultimately, a personal commitment to Christ will inform fully functioning membership and highly functioning discipleship more than anything else. Aside from helping participants achieve a fundamental commitment to Christ, a formal membership process also provides the opportunity for its leaders to carry out the command of Christ to "teach these new disciples all the commands I have given you" (Matt. 28:20). The Bible does not clearly state whether or not the commands should be taught prior to initiation into a local church or after the initiation—maybe because "before and after" is implied. The results of this project reveal that the Orchard 101 course helped people experience change and growth in many areas that easily correspond with the teaching of Jesus' commands. The work of Rainer in his book High Expectations

reports that membership courses are most effective in local churches when they are required. In light of Rainer's research, the findings of this study, and biblical direction, some sort of rigorous membership process appears necessary for the local church.

Nevertheless, one should not be led to believe that the membership course is a magic bullet in the discipleship process. Discipleship is an ongoing process, just as member involvement is, and the membership course in a local church should be viewed as a valuable process at the beginning of a journey, not the one thing that will help people grow. Jesus is Lord and Savior; not a method, system, or course. The course is only a tool to bring people to Jesus.

APPENDIX A

Spirituality Assessment

Spirituality Assessment

Anonymous Code: _____ (last four digits of Social Security number)

This assessment is to be taken anonymously to ensure honest responses.

Demographic Information

Gender: M F

Age: ☐13-17 ☐18-30 ☐31-40 ☐41-50 ☐51-60 ☐61-70 ☐71+

Previous Faith Involvement:

Are you “one hundred percent confident” that you are a Christian? (check one)

☐Yes ☐No

How many years ago did you become a Christian? (check one)

☐1 year or less ☐1-2 ☐3-5 ☐6-8 ☐9-12 ☐13-20 ☐21+

Previous Church Involvement Other than the Orchard:

How many years ago? (check one)

☐1 year or less ☐1-2 ☐3-5 ☐6-8 ☐9-12 ☐13-20 ☐21+

How active were you? (check one)

☐very active ☐somewhat active ☐worship only

Assessment Information

Instructions:

- Please give the first honest answer that comes to mind.
- This assessment should reflect who you really are, not who you want to be or who you think you should be.
- Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.
- Mark your answers in one of the seven circles between “never” and “always.”

Example Answers:

Do you read the Bible everyday?

Answer One: "Yes, it is an every day habit."

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ALWAYS

Answer Two: "No, but usually at least once or twice a week."

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

Answer Three: "I cannot clearly recall the last time I read the Bible alone."

NEVER ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

The Spirituality Assessment:

1. Do you easily identify yourself as one who has experienced salvation through Jesus?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

2. How often does your relationship with Jesus factor into your daily decision making processes?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

3. Do your actions communicate that you are a follower of Jesus even if you do not speak to others about it?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

4. Do you consider yourself to be a Godly source of light in the places where you work?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

5. Do you spend time caring for needy friends through meaningful conversation and with helpful actions?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

6. Do you personally study the Bible to find wisdom to use for daily living?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

7. How often do you miss daily devotional time with God?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

8. Do you look for opportunities to tell others about your faith?

NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

9. Do you consider God's will when making major financial purchases?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
10. How often do you attend weekly worship?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
11. On a weekly basis, do you ever "hang-out" with church friends?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
12. On a monthly basis, how often do you intentionally tell others about Jesus?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
13. Weekly, how often do you serve others through a "Serve Team" at the Orchard?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
14. How often do you pray specifically for the needs of other people?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
15. Do you serve God in ways that are consistent with your personal talents or aptitudes?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
16. Do you seek opportunities to care for other attenders at the Orchard?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
17. Are you involved with a Grow Group on a weekly basis?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
18. Do you have confidence that you will be a follower of Jesus your whole life?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
19. Does your relationship with Jesus play a part in helping you make decisions about lifelong goals?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
20. How often do you believe that you fail to follow all of the Ten Commandments?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS
21. Are you perceived as a follower of Jesus in work-related relationships?
NEVER ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

22. Is “serving God” part of your weekly experience of following Jesus?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

23. Do you make decisions based on what you have learned from God's Word?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

24. Do you maintain the practice of regular worship?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

25. How often do you remain silent when you feel led to speak to someone else about God or church?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

26. Do you give financially to your local church?

NEVER ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ALWAYS

27. How often do you believe you grow spiritually through your weekly worship experiences?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

28. How often to you attend church events other than weekly worship?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

29. How often are you active with a Reach Team or Serve Fest efforts at the Orchard?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

30. Do you consider being able to serve others who do not yet understand Jesus a privilege?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

31. How often do you pray for the Orchard to complete her mission successfully?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

32. How often do you plan ahead to give a certain percentage of your monthly income?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

33. How often do you fail to show care for others in tangible, face-to-face ways when an opportunity is right in front of you?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

34. How often do you use spiritual principles that you learned about at worship or in a small group in daily situations?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

35. How often do you doubt the existence of God?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

36. How often do you think that other demands or temptations supercede your relationship with God?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

37. Do you practice the teachings of the Bible in daily living?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

38. Do you seek to help others based on something you have learned from God?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

39. Do you think that you have a big heart for people who are in need?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

40. Does your understanding of Scripture ever make you think twice about a certain decision?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

41. Do you spend daily time in prayer for yourself and others?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

42. Are you sometimes preoccupied with the idea that not everyone around you in certain social situations is a follower of Jesus?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

43. Do you ever think about the idea that you are just using or enjoying something that God has created for you?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

44. How often do you leave worship not really having felt God's presence?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

45. How often do you have meaningful conversations at church events?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

46. Do you seek opportunities to invite “unchurched” people to attend church?

NEVER ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ALWAYS

47. How often do you find personal fulfillment and/or spiritual growth from serving others?

NEVER ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ALWAYS

48. On a weekly basis, how often do you pray with others?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

49. How often do you believe you serve others in ways that are in alignment with your personal gifts, abilities, and aptitudes?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

50. Do you sometimes wonder what people need in order to live a better life?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

51. On a weekly basis, are you learning things at the Orchard that are helping you follow Jesus?

NEVER ○○○○○○ ALWAYS

APPENDIX B

Orchard 101 Membership Course Outline

Session One-Beginning The Journey of Following Jesus

1. Being a Follower of Jesus is not...
2. Being a Follower of Jesus is...
3. Starting the Journey of Following Jesus
 - a. A prayer for beginning.
 - b. Other words for beginning.
4. Tips for Following Jesus

Session Two-Small Groups and Methodism

1. Why Small Groups?
2. Small Group Model vs. Traditional Model
3. Biblical Case Studies for Small Groups
 - a. Exodus.
 - b. Jesus.
 - c. Book of Acts.
4. Four Characteristics of Small Groups in The Orchard
5. The Government of The United Methodist Church
6. How Do Pastors Move?
7. A Methodist Understanding of Sacraments
 - a. Communion.
 - b. Baptism.

Session Three-Gifts and Talents

1. Opening Discussion
 - a. Pop quiz about good reasons for serving.
 - b. Video presentation about bad reasons for serving.
2. Passion (with worksheet)
3. Spiritual Gifts (with inventory)
4. Personal Style (with assessment)

Session Four-Two Big Scary Words

1. A Dream For Evangelism in The Orchard
 - a. High love.
 - b. Low pressure.
 - c. High expectation.
 - d. Hard Work.
2. Tithing
 - a. Biblical foundations.
 - b. Three implications.
 - c. Giving chart.

Session Five-Mission and Core Ministry Values

1. What is a Mission?
2. The Orchard Mission-Expanded
 - a. Growing.
 - b. New.
 - c. Stronger.
 - d. Followers of Jesus.
3. The Context of Core Ministry Values
4. Core Ministry Values for The Orchard

Session Six-Membership Expectations

1. Membership in the Church with a Big “C”
2. Membership in general
3. The Dream for Membership at The Orchard
4. The Purposes of Membership at The Orchard
 - a. Bearing fruit.
 - b. Reaching up.
 - c. Branching out.
 - d. Standing firm.
 - e. Growing deep.
5. Ministry Involvement Strategy
6. Member Accountability and Covenant

APPENDIX C

Membership Covenant

Membership Covenant

The Orchard-A United Methodist Community of Faith

“Growing New and Stronger Followers of Jesus”



Having repented of my sins and having placed my whole trust in God’s grace by deciding to follow Jesus, I begin my membership at The Orchard by committing my life in the following ways:

- I accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of my life.
- I will participate in the Worship + 2 ministry involvement strategy.
- I will seek to live out an authentic expression of Christian faith that is recognized by others.
- I will seek to accomplish ministry that is in alignment with the vision, purposes, and core values of The Orchard.
- I will work with others at The Orchard so that we might “Grow New and Stronger Followers of Jesus” together.

Date

Signature

Ben Cathey-Pastor

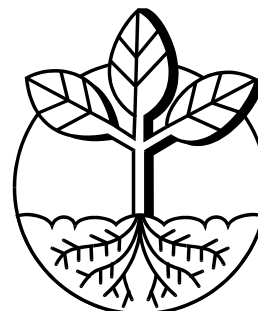
APPENDIX D

Bulletin Announcement

Orchard 101

Getting Started in The Orchard

**Sunday Nights beginning
August 14th @ 7PM**



Orchard 101 gets you started at The Orchard. It is a great opportunity to meet people and to learn more about how you can grow spiritually through the ministries of The Orchard. In this six-week course we take a look at the unique mission and vision of The Orchard, the call of Christ upon every believer, and many subjects that will help you grow in your experience of Jesus. Orchard 101 is required for membership at The Orchard. The six sessions are:

Week One—Beginning the Journey of Following Jesus

Week Two— Small Groups and Methodism

Week Three—Spiritual Gifts

Week Four—Evangelism and Tithing

Week Five—Mission, Core Ministry Values, and Ministry Design

Week Six—Membership Expectations

This is a life-giving, life-changing course that will inform your mind, instruct your heart, and challenge your soul.

- **Child care provided.**
- **We will meet at 143 Walton Place on Lee Byrd Rd.**
- **Sign-up below or on the Connect Card.**

NAME(S): _____

CHILD CARE NEEDS

NAME(S): _____

AGE(S): _____

APPENDIX E

Orchard 101 Invitation Letter

Dear Friend,

I write to let you know about the Orchard 101 course. This is an opportunity for you to find out more about The Orchard and consider becoming a member. Orchard 101 – Getting Started at The Orchard” is a 6-week course that will be taught on Sundays at 7PM beginning August 14th.

Orchard 101 is designed to give you an overview of the Christian Faith, as well as a basic understanding of the mission, vision, core values, and organization of The Orchard. We will also take a look at the history of The Orchard and its connection to the larger United Methodist Church. When the course is over we will have a celebration time where you may join The Orchard as a member. Baptism into the Christian faith is also celebrated at the Orchard 101 Celebration. Attendance at an Orchard 101 course is required for membership at The Orchard. Make up sessions will be provided for people who have to miss one or two sessions because of prior commitments.

Orchards 101 is taught in small group environments to give participants a taste of what being in a small group feels like. This is one of the most important elements of the Orchard 101 course because at The Orchard we believe that “Christians grow best as they experience Jesus in small groups.”

The course will meet at The Orchard office. Childcare is available if requested ahead of time. Call or e-mail to signup or with questions.



Because Of Jesus,

Ben Cathey

APPENDIX F

Control Group Invitation Letter

Dear Dissertation Research Partners,

Last week I sent a letter inviting you to participate in an exciting project at the Orchard. As part of the requirements for my doctoral degree I am researching spirituality in The Orchard Church.

Enclosed with this letter is the first of three "Spirituality Assessment" surveys. Please finish the survey and use the stamped envelope to return it as soon as possible. Don't forget your anonymous code. If you like, you can just leave your finished copy in the offering basket on Sunday morning.

Please contact me with questions at 770-554-3533 or ben@theorchardchurch.org.

I can't thank you enough for your help. Your help is valuable to me personally and I also hope that my findings will benefit the ministry of the Orchard.

Remember that a second assessment will come to you in just a few weeks.

With Gratitude,

Ben

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